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*The Beginnings of
the True Railway Mail Service*

George Buchanan Armstrong

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W. B. Armstrong Jr.

Chicago May 27. 1910

THE BEGINNINGS
OF THE TRUE
RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE







GEO. B. ARMSTRONG,
Founder of the United States Railway Mail Service.

THE BEGINNINGS
OF THE TRUE
RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE

AND THE WORK OF
GEORGE B. ARMSTRONG
IN FOUNDING IT

by

George B. Armstrong, Jr.



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A Word of Comment

The object in printing these pages is to show that to the fertile brain and intense energy of the late George B. Armstrong of Chicago, this country is indebted for the efficient Railway Mail Service as it exists to-day. The volume is composed of extracts taken from the official history of the Railway Mail Service, prepared by the Post Office Department in 1884 and published in 1885, together with other matter that is especially relevant in this connection; to wit, an historical letter written by Postmaster Samuel Hoard of Chicago in 1865; the address of Ex-Vice-President Schuyler Colfax at the unveiling of the Armstrong monument at Chicago in May, 1881; and the address delivered by Postmaster E. W. Keyes of Madison, Wisconsin, one of Mr. Armstrong's heartiest coadjutors in the early days of the Railway Mail Service, at the banquet given to Postmaster-General Charles Emory Smith in Chicago, in April, 1900. There are also reminiscences of the railway postal clerks, and other postal officers, who were associated with Mr. Armstrong in the beginnings of the service that have a specific interest.

This testimony is of the highest value as contemporaneous proof. Especially so is the letter of former Postmaster Francis A. Eastman, of Chicago, which shows that Mr. Armstrong had a correct conception of the necessities of the postal service as early as 1861. In that year he told Mr. Eastman with emphasis that he was "going to put the post office on wheels."

Mr. Armstrong was peculiarly fortunate in enlisting at an early stage of his labors the hearty co-operation of the Hon. Schuyler Colfax, afterwards Vice-President of the United States, then Speaker of the House. Mr. Colfax's support was

of inestimable benefit, because, knowing intimately all of Mr. Armstrong's plans for this grand postal reform, he was in a position where he could accomplish an infinite amount of good. His address is of great value from an historical point of view. General Grant was fully acquainted with Mr. Armstrong's successful efforts to secure the best and speediest distribution of the immense mails for the western armies, and knew also of his plans in regard to the general improvement of the postal service. After General Grant had been installed in the presidential chair, one of the first important moves on the part of his Postmaster-General, the Hon. J. A. J. Creswell, was to give a wider scope to the system of railway post offices by making it a separate bureau of the Post Office Department, with George B. Armstrong as its head.

The main facts concerning the establishment of the Railway Mail Service and of Mr. Armstrong's connection therewith are to be found in the official history, but they are arranged without regard to their cumulative value, so that too much time and patience are necessary to pick them out and place them in proper and logical order. In this print these facts are sifted and given their natural sequence. They show beyond question that the three exhaustive "Letters on Postal Reform" which were addressed by George B. Armstrong, while Assistant Postmaster at Chicago, to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General under Postmaster-General Montgomery Blair, in the months of May and June, 1864, and which were published in pamphlet form and widely distributed by Mr. Armstrong, were really the foundation-stones of the service as it exists to-day. These letters are printed in the official history of the Railway Mail Service as Appendix M, on pages 165-171. They also appear in full in this book, on pages 60-73.

Each extract from the official history here used is credited to the page from which it was taken.

GEO. B. ARMSTRONG, JR.

CHICAGO, April, 1906.

The True Railway Mail Service

(Official History, issued in January, 1885, page 59)

In one sense the history of the Railway Mail Service covers the period from the day the first pouch was carried by rail, but for the first thirty years it is a history of transportation merely, — how much mail was carried, how far, and how fast or how slow. The true Railway Mail Service is recent, its history being comprised within the last twenty years. (1864–1884.)

Mr. Armstrong's First Commission

(Official History, page 92)

The first mention we have of George B. Armstrong in connection with the Railway Mail Service is in 1864. In the summer of 1864, Mr. Armstrong addressed three letters to A. N. Zevely, then Third Assistant Postmaster-General.

These letters from Mr. Armstrong to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General are dated Chicago, May 10, May 14, and June 10, respectively. The letter commissioning Mr. Armstrong to test by actual experiment the plans proposed in these letters, is dated July 1, 1864, and is as follows:

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT, July 1, 1864.

SIR: You are authorized to test by actual experiment, upon such railroad route or routes as you may select at Chicago, the plans proposed by you for simplifying the mail service. You will arrange with railroad companies to furnish suitable cars for traveling post-offices; designate "head offices," with their dependent offices; prepare forms of blanks and instructions for all such offices, and those on the railroad not "head offices;" also for the clerks of traveling post offices.

To aid you in this work, you may select some suitable route

agent, whose place can be supplied by a substitute, at the expense of this Department.

When your arrangements are complete, you will report them in full.

GEORGE B. ARMSTRONG,
Chicago, Ill.

M. BLAIR,
Postmaster-General.

Mr. Armstrong's Achievements in Detail

(Official History, pages 178-179)

H. L. Johnson, principal clerk in the Mail Equipment Division of the Post Office Department, under date of July 22, 1884, contributed an interesting article to the official history on the early days of the Railway Mail Service. The following extract gives much detailed information of a valuable nature in relation to George B. Armstrong's work:

A short time after Mr. Waller had undertaken to make the arrangements with the Atlantic and Great Western Railway, Mr. Armstrong, who was then Assistant Postmaster of Chicago, appeared before the Department in the character of a zealous and intelligent advocate of the "traveling post-office system," as he then styled it.

He was received by the chief clerk of the contract office, to whom the preliminary consideration of the subject properly belonged, with coldness and disfavor. But in the Third Assistant Postmaster-General (A. N. Zevely), who was then giving his attention largely to the development of postal reforms and improvements, he found friendly encouragement and wise counsel. At his request Mr. Armstrong communicated his views in writing, addressing to him a series of letters setting forth principally his plan of improving the regularity and dispatch of the mails by the use of the traveling post office.

These letters, three in number, were written successively in the months of May and June, 1864, and in the latter month Mr. Armstrong caused them to be printed at Chicago, in very small pamphlet form, for circulation.

In one of the letters referred to, Mr. Armstrong pointed out

objections to the then existing method of mailing direct, and made a suggestion which, having afterwards been adopted, proved to be of incalculable benefit to the service.

It was simply to dispense with wrappers for letters or packets of letters, and, instead, to tie them together so that one of the letters of legible address be *faced outside*. By this simple method not only paper, labor, and the time of wrapping and writing were saved, but the commission of many errors in writing the directions was entirely prevented, and the means afforded of quickly detecting and correcting errors in bagging; whereas with the wrappers, which it was forbidden to open except at the place of address, errors were perpetuated from hand to hand, in transit, without the opportunity of correction, and letters were thus continually being miscarried and delayed in reaching their proper destination.

His project discountenanced by the contract office, Mr. Armstrong sought again the friendly support of the Third Assistant Postmaster-General, who undertook its presentation to the attention of the Postmaster-General, but, however, not without obtaining the consent of the Second Assistant Postmaster-General, to whose bureau of duties the matter properly belonged.

The Postmaster-General (Judge Blair) was found to be favorably disposed to experiment with the traveling post office.

Animated by the approval of the Postmaster-General, sustained by the patronage of the Third Assistant Postmaster-General, and accredited by a traveling commission as special agent of the Department, Mr. Armstrong, while yet Assistant Postmaster at Chicago, addressed himself with assiduity and tact to enlist the good will of railroad companies for his project. He prevailed on the officers of the Chicago and North-Western Railway (shortly before known as the Galena & Chicago Union), who it is said were distinguished for liberal views and public spirit, to consent to alter, enlarge, and fit up their mail cars for the traveling post office business.

Soon afterward other railroad companies manifested a willingness to follow their example; and through the efforts of the Third Assistant Postmaster-General those between Washington, New York, and Boston consented to provide suitable accommodations for the traveling post office.

In that year (1864) experiments were successfully made

on those roads. Besides retaining for their local knowledge and experience the route agents already on those roads, the traveling post offices were further manned by distributing-clerks transferred from post offices.

This second and greatly enlarged experiment with traveling post offices having achieved surprising improvement, as far as it was extended, in the dispatch of the mails, and the expediency of permanently incorporating the system in the postal service being no longer a matter of doubt, the Postmaster-General (Governor Denison), in his report of November, 1864, recommended that express provision, by law, be made for the employment of clerks and superintendents for that service.

On the 22d of December, 1864, Mr. Armstrong was appointed a special agent of the Department to further organize and superintend traveling post offices, and Harrison Park and Charles E. Wheeler were also appointed special agents to assist in that work.

By the act of March 3, 1865, the traveling post office was recognized by law, under the name of "railway post office," and the Postmaster-General was authorized to employ clerks for the same; also two special agents to superintend that service.

On the 1st of May, 1865, Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Park were appointed special agents for that purpose, the former stationed at Chicago to superintend the railway post offices of the West, and the latter stationed at Washington to superintend those of the East.

A plan of organization, drawn up and proposed by Mr. Armstrong, was adopted by the Postmaster-General (Hon. J. A. J. Creswell) and promulgated to go into effect July 1, 1869, consolidating the railway post offices with all other railroad mail service in the United States, under the title of "Railway Mail Service."

By this plan the whole railway mail service was divided into six divisions, each embracing several States, and each division was subdivided into districts embracing one or more States and parts of States.

To each five of the six divisions an assistant superintendent of railway mail service was assigned, under the general direction and control of a "superintendent of railway mail service," stationed at the Department in Washington, and Mr. Armstrong

was, by the Postmaster-General, made that superintendent, a position which he held until May 3, 1871, when he resigned, and very shortly afterwards died.

The railway post office system was now firmly established as a permanent institution in the postal service of this country.

Perfected Organization

(Official History, page 63)

In 1869 . . . the railway post office, which for several years had been under the double supervision of George B. Armstrong in the West and Harrison Park in the East, in this year, under Postmaster-General Creswell, received a new impetus. Mr. Armstrong was called to Washington and given entire control of the railway post office service. Mr. Creswell reports in 1869 the railway post offices as indispensable, and promises that as the population and wealth of the country shall increase, this new system of handling the mails will be extended to keep pace with the wants and demands of the people.

(Official History, page 95)

In the year 1869 we come upon the first outlines of the present system of divisions and division superintendents. Up to this time the superintendence of this branch of the service was performed by men designated and paid as special agents, but as Congress refused in the appropriation for 1869 to give more than \$100,000 for special agents, the Department was compelled to reorganize this branch of the service so far as the Railway Mail Service was concerned. The following scheme was the result, which was adopted to take effect July 1, 1869. Six divisions were created, as follows:

1. Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.
2. New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and the eastern shore of Virginia.

The True Railway Mail Service

3. Virginia (excluding the eastern shore), North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi.

4. Ohio, West Virginia, Michigan (excluding the upper peninsula), Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

5. Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the upper peninsula of Michigan.

6. Embraces all that territory west of the ninety-sixth meridian and Louisiana.

To each of five of these divisions was assigned one special agent, with the designation of "Assistant Superintendent of Railway Mail Service," charged with the special supervision of the transportation of the mails.

Undoubtedly this arrangement of the country into divisions was a part of the first work done by Mr. Armstrong in his attempts to systematize the service. He had been made General Superintendent April 4, 1869, and continued in office until he resigned, May 3, 1871, when he was succeeded by George S. Bangs.

Departmental Correspondence

(Official History, pages 148-149)

FINANCE OFFICE, August 10, 1864.

DEAR SIR: Your letters of the 7th are received. I am glad to know that you are getting matters arranged for the new service. The suggestion in regard to the appointment of the clerks for the railway post office has been submitted to the Postmaster-General, and he fully agrees with you that these appointments should be filled with persons of accurate knowledge and experience in postal matters.

The Postmaster-General will not listen to the question of additional compensation in connection with the construction of the cars for railway post offices. That must be brought up separately. I inclose you a copy of a letter addressed to the

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postmaster at Philadelphia on same subject in which the Postmaster-General's views are fully set forth.

Yours, respectfully, &c.,

A. N. ZEVELY,

G. B. ARMSTRONG, *Third Assistant Postmaster-General.*
Chicago, Ill.

FINANCE OFFICE, August 16, 1864.

DEAR SIR: Your letters of 12th, accompanied by various forms of blanks, &c., prepared by you, are received.

A great portion of the blanks had been previously prepared here, and are now in the hands of the printer. They are substantially the same as you send. As soon as we get proofs of them, we will forward to you.

We are also preparing instructions to postmasters and railway post office clerks in regard to that branch of business. I wish you would send what you have prepared, so that we may compare them, and get them, if possible, similar. The stamps named in your letter have been ordered, and will be sent you as soon as received. I also have to say that I have ignored the name "traveling" post office and have adopted "United States Railway Post Office."

I am, very respectfully,

A. N. ZEVELY,

G. B. ARMSTRONG, *Third Assistant Postmaster-General.*
Chicago, Ill.

(Official History, page 86)

Harrison Park, who was selected as Mr. Armstrong's assistant under the authority given in Postmaster-General Blair's letter dated July 1, 1864, wrote in September, 1867, to a New York postal official:

This meeting was held in the Post Office Department about the middle of June, 1864, the result of which was that the

Department determined upon the experiment. George B. Armstrong, then Assistant Postmaster at Chicago, and C. E. Wheeler of the Cleveland post office, were selected to superintend and put the improvement to the test — Mr. Armstrong upon certain railroad lines in the West, and Mr. Wheeler in the East. Mr. Armstrong, however, was then the Assistant Postmaster at Chicago, and as the duties of that position required his whole time and constant attention, he asked for and obtained permission to employ a competent assistant. From my experience in postal affairs and knowledge of its workings upon railroad lines, and because I was a believer in and advocate of the proposed new service, I was selected to assist him in the West.

The first line of railway postal service inaugurated and put in operation was upon the Galena division of the Chicago and North-Western Railway, between Chicago, and Clinton, Iowa, August 28, 1864. The next line put in operation was the New York and Washington line, which was immediately followed by its introduction on the Chicago and Rock Island, and the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy railroads in the West, and on the Pennsylvania Central and the New York and Erie railroads in the East.



Impressive Personal Testimony

In the year 1895, a publishing house in St. Louis, Missouri, conceived the idea of preparing in elaborate form a history of the present Railway Mail Service, to include, with other matter, reminiscences of the clerks who were associated with George B. Armstrong in his great work of establishing the existing service upon a firm and expansive foundation. The project progressed quite a way towards completion, when the financial panic that paralyzed the country in 1894 forced the firm into bankruptcy. A number of personal reminiscences were gathered in manuscript form for use in that connection. The salient points of a part of these tributes, as many as space will allow, presented in this volume for the first time to the public, furnish impressive corroborative evidence of the great value of Mr. Armstrong's work, and also to the fact that he was the one man who conceived the plan of the present Railway Mail Service and carried it to an eminently successful culmination.

All the early correspondence in relation to the establishing of the railway mail service was destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871, so that these reminiscences of the postal clerks and other officials possess a double significance.

These reminiscences are now in the possession of the Chicago Historical Society.

Francis A. Eastman

Ex-Postmaster, Chicago, Ill.

Among the great inventions and improvements in the postal service, perhaps the greatest of them all was that so laboriously and patiently thought out by George B. Arm-

strong, which converted all the railway mail trains in the country into distributing post offices.

George B. Armstrong was a native of the north of Ireland. His mother was a Buchanan, and she traced a relationship to James Buchanan, a fact which brought the Armstrongs over to this country. While his eminent relative was a United States Senator, young Armstrong made use of the Senator's influence to get himself a place in the Post Office Department. There, in the capacity of clerk in the contract office, he labored intelligently and faithfully, and it was there that he acquired that kind of knowledge of postal business which early distinguished him as an expert. His proved executive ability obtained for him the recommendation of his superior to the Postmaster at Chicago, who was at that time in quest of an experienced man to be his assistant. This was in 1854. In the position of Assistant Postmaster, he remained through successive administrations, and until 1865, when, at his own request, he was relieved to give his entire time and energy to the railway postal system.

It was in 1864 that he made known to the Department at Washington the outline of his scheme for mail distribution on the railways. His presentation of the scheme was so plain and attractive that it received the unhesitating indorsement of Postmaster-General Montgomery Blair.

The first I can remember of ever hearing of the idea of a railway postal service was in the summer of 1861. Mr. Armstrong was still the Assistant Postmaster, and his duties were then particularly arduous, owing to the change of administration and the illness of the new postmaster. His residence was on the next street to mine, and in the corresponding block, and it so happened that we two frequently fell in with each other in our walks to and from business. It was not long before I observed that he was disinclined to talk by the way on miscellaneous topics. His speech and

thoughts were all upon the work at the post office. "I tell you," he said on one occasion, "we do not yet know what to do with our post offices. We have but a village here, compared to the city we shall have. This vast western country is still almost empty of settlers, and even so, the mails that are hourly dumped into the post office fill up the entire space and paralyze the men. Unless something is done towards relief, the post office system will break down of its own weight."

Perhaps it was a year after this, possibly not six months, that I had another casual talk with Mr. Armstrong on the subject that was uppermost in his mind. He informed me that he had about thought out a way to relieve the post offices of the country and save an immense amount of money to the government in new or enlarged buildings, and to work a notable economy of time in the transportation of mails. Under this plan he thought the post office buildings would not for many years require to be much enlarged, and the time it took to transport the mails from one side of the country to the other would be reduced to a very few days. This latter he did not expect to accomplish immediately, or all at once. "I am going," he said, excitedly, "to put the post office upon wheels." I did not ask him if he was crazy, but I had my suspicions. Still later, Mr. Armstrong called upon me at my office to ask my assistance as a newspaper man to set before the public in a favorable light the fact that he had invented a railway postal-car. He then first made known to me that his plans were complete, and that upon a day named and fixed he would run it out upon the Chicago and North-Western Railway. It was to be a trial trip, and a number of merchants and bankers would go along with him, and he would be glad to have some representatives of the press also to be of the party. This was in August, 1864.

The trial trip was made, Mr. Armstrong was pleased with it, and the clerks of the Chicago post office that assisted were confident that the scheme was a good one. But the merchants and bankers had their doubts. They had fears that the mail would not be handled in the cars without too great danger of loss of valuable letters. My own report in my newspaper was not too favorable; while the reports of one or two others of the city journals were almost fiercely hostile. Now and ever after, more and more of Mr. Armstrong's time was taken up with the early workings and the improving of the new service. There were constantly new demands upon his time and energies, in the urgent interest of his great and still enlarging undertaking. Truly, his whole soul was in his work.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

John B. Harlow

Ex-Postmaster, St. Louis, Mo.

I entered the railway postal service in September, 1866, and was assigned to the Chicago and Centralia railway post office by George B. Armstrong, who, at that time, was the directing and controlling spirit of that (then) new branch of the postal service.

The character of the service was such that, in this country at least, there was no precedent to be guided by, and necessarily each and all advances made were the result of the individual thought and action of Mr. Armstrong. That his foresight and judgment were correct is proved by the fact that the principles and characteristics of the service are to-day virtually the same as at the time of its inauguration.

Even the system of checking "errors in distribution" was introduced by him, as is evidenced by the following order, received by me on the date of issue:

POST OFFICE, CHICAGO, ILL., Nov. 10, 1868.

SIR: You are hereby detailed to run for one week from Thursday, November 12th, from Mattoon to Centralia, and examine all mail thrown or pouched in the car each day by the R. P. O. clerks running from Centralia to Cairo, and report to me, in writing, all errors in said mail.

G. B. ARMSTRONG.

J. B. HARLOW, Railway Postal Clerk.

The only service at all similar that preceded the introduction of the service under Mr. Armstrong in 1864, of which I have either heard or read, was on the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railway, placed there, I am informed, on the recommendation and under the supervision of a Mr. Davis, at that time Assistant Postmaster at St. Joseph; and as I understand, it was born of necessity.

The St. Joseph office, being at the time mentioned the receiving-office for all mails for dispatch west, found it impossible, with the space and time at their disposal, to distribute and dispatch the same on schedule time; hence the origin of the thought, "How can the time and space be gained?" The sequel naturally was the preparation of the mail, in part at least, not by the route agents on that line but by clerks sent from the post office at St. Joe to meet the trains and work this mail while in transit to the Missouri River.

I have never heard that even so much as a thought was given to working the mails east-bound, and, necessarily, the arrangement can only be looked upon as a "makeshift" — solely for the relief of the overcrowded St. Joe office, and therefore not to be considered as in line with the idea conceived and carried into effect by Mr. Armstrong, whose inception, it is evident, embraced the whole country throughout which railway post offices were to be established, and the mails to be distributed and forwarded as rapidly as in the case of passengers.

In conclusion, I will state that with my knowledge and

information on the subject, I have never for a moment entertained a doubt that to George B. Armstrong, and to no other, belongs the credit of being known as the founder of the present Railway Mail Service.

St. Louis, Mo., 1895.

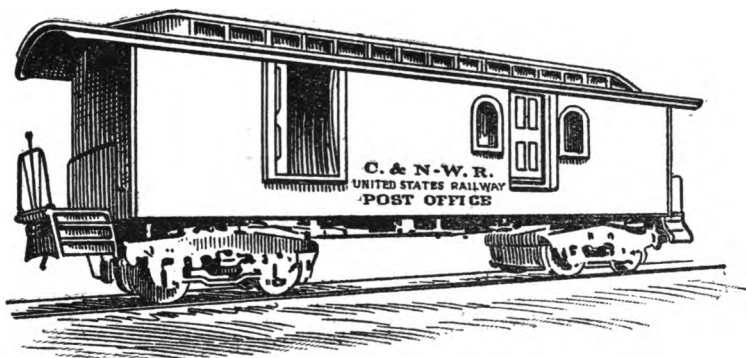
James E. White

General Superintendent Railway Mail Service

The first railway post office in the United States was established August 28th, 1864, upon the Chicago and North-Western Railway, and ran between Chicago, Ill., and Clinton, Iowa, in an apartment car improvised for the purpose, with Percy A. Leonard as head clerk, and Asa F. Bradley assistant. Mr. Bradley, an old surveyor, aided Mr. Armstrong in drawing plans for the car, and the arrangement of letter-cases in angles instead of circles was Mr. Bradley's idea. The first full railway post office cars were built by the Chicago and North-Western Railway, on plans furnished by George B. Armstrong, in 1867, and were placed in service between Boone and Council Bluffs, Iowa, at a time when that railway post office distributed the overland letter mail. I assisted in labeling the letter and paper cases in these cars.

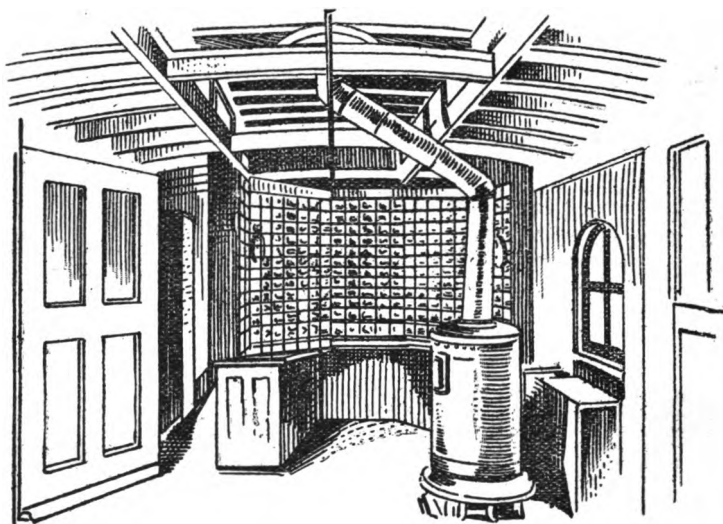
Mr. Armstrong was unquestionably the father of the Railway Mail Service in the United States. The idea of distributing the mails while in transit, thus expediting their delivery, and practically sweeping out what was then known as distributing post offices, was his conception. He lived to see his dream realized. Enough had been accomplished to demonstrate that the plan he had worked out was not only practicable, but essential to the business interests of the country.

Mr. Armstrong was appointed General Superintendent of the Railway Mail Service in 1869, though he had been the real head of the service, with headquarters in Chicago, from

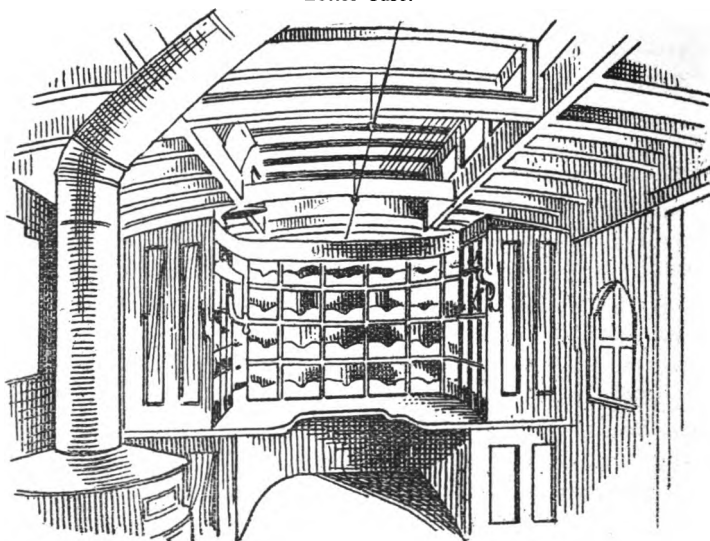


THE FIRST RAILWAY POSTAL CAR IN THE UNITED STATES.

**Built by the Chicago and North-Western Railway in May, 1867, after plans drawn by
Geo. B. Armstrong.**



Letter Case.



Paper Case.

**INTERIOR VIEWS OF THE FIRST RAILWAY POSTAL CAR.
Built after Plans Drawn by Geo. B. Armstrong.**

the date of its establishment in August, 1864. The writer remembers distinctly of meeting him in Iowa, Illinois, and Nebraska while he was making tours of inspection, and of holding conversations with him respecting the service and his plans for the future development of it; and from these could but reach the conclusion that he then anticipated that the service would ultimately become exceedingly important and useful.

WASHINGTON, D. C., 1895.

James E. Stuart

Post Office Inspector in Charge

In the fall of 1866, I was appointed by Postmaster-General Alexander W. Randall, route agent on the Chicago and North-Western Railway from Chicago to Green Bay, Wisconsin. On receiving my appointment, I was instructed to report for duty to George B. Armstrong, of Chicago, my home then being at Oshkosh.

I well remember the day that I reported to Mr. Armstrong and the conversation that I had with him on that occasion. He was very particular in making inquiries as to who I was and what had been my previous occupation. He expressed himself as glad to know that I was young and strong, and that I had served throughout the war. He informed me then that he intended soon to establish a railway postal service on the Chicago and North-Western Railway from Chicago to Green Bay, Wisconsin; that of the appointments made quite a number were young men who had served in the army, and, said he, "that is the kind of material that I am anxious to get into this service. I feel that they are the kind of men on whom I can rely for assistance in developing the railway postal service of the West, and I believe that this class of men should be appointed."

I continued the run upon this line of the railway post a

service until the fall of 1866, when I was called to the office by Mr. Armstrong and was informed by him that he had selected a number of clerks on several of the lines on which the railway postal service had been established, and that it was his intention to send these men to run over the Chicago and North-Western Railway through the state of Iowa to Omaha, and that I was one of the number selected for this run. Up to this time, it had been the custom to send all mail for that country west of the Missouri River to the large distributing offices, such as Salt Lake City, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Denver, and all mail from all sections of the country east of the Missouri River, for this western country, was put in pouches and marked to these distributing offices. The result was, that the mail which accumulated at the Missouri River amounted to an immense number of pouches, some containing a large quantity of mail, while others, perhaps, contained but a single letter. To prevent the transportation of that unnecessarily large number of pouches over that long stretch of country to reach Salt Lake City, Sacramento, and San Francisco, many of which pouches contained only a single letter, or at most a handful of letters, Mr. Armstrong conceived the idea of consolidating this mail and therefore established a service for that purpose on the line of the Chicago and North-Western Railway from Boone to Council Bluffs, Iowa, and issued an order directing that all pouches from the eastern country and eastern lines marked for those western cities be forwarded via the Chicago and North-Western Railway to Omaha.

These clerks, in running west, had to unload their mail at Council Bluffs oftentimes having to take from one to three large double wagon loads of paper mail out of the baggage car into wagons, which they had to accompany for three miles, the greater part of the way over corduroy roads. In wet weather, oftentimes the wagons would get stuck in the

mud and the mail would have to be unloaded, and the wagon pulled out of the mud, and the mails loaded up again before the Missouri River was reached opposite Omaha. I have seen the day when this had to be done from two to three times in one trip. In summer weather the wagons would cross the river on the ferry boat, and in winter on the ice, but oftentimes in winter the mails would be unloaded and left on the eastern bank of the Missouri River, there to remain all night, or until it was possible to get across to the Omaha shore. I have known postal clerks many times to remain with their mail on the bank of the Missouri River the whole night long, and oftentimes when they had to bury themselves under their mail to keep from freezing. Mr. Armstrong thoroughly understood the hardships which these clerks had sometimes to undergo in handling the mails between Council Bluffs and Omaha, for he had on more than one occasion witnessed it, and on one occasion came out with us to see what could be done towards the better transmission of the mails from Council Bluffs to Omaha. On this visit, Mr. Armstrong and the clerks could not get across the Missouri River until the following morning. On reaching the bank of the Missouri River through snow and mud, the open mail-wagons were unloaded, the mail was deposited on the bank of the river, and the wagons were taken back to Council Bluffs. A camp fire was built and our superintendent, Mr. Armstrong, with the clerks, sat around that camp fire in the mud guarding the tons of large mails for the West and talking over the situation all the night long. At break of day, when the storm had subsided sufficiently to allow the ferry boat to land, these clerks, assisted by Mr. Armstrong, carried the mail to the boat by which it was transported to the other shore, when it had to be unloaded again and re-loaded on wagons for the Omaha office.

The primitive postal-car was to the well-equipped rail-

way post office of to-day what an ordinary freight-caboose is to a Pullman palace-car. But George B. Armstrong, who had the practical judgment to recognize at that time the public need of a railway postal service, and gave it its crude beginning, had also the prophetic vision to foresee its possibilities. Too much credit cannot be given to Mr. Armstrong, who, nothing daunted by lack of faith on the part of the high officials of the Post Office Department, and the doubts and taunts of an incredulous public, had still the courage of his convictions to press steadily on until he gave to the commercial world the greatest boon it has received within the last half-century.

In the Government Building in Chicago stands a modest bronze bust erected to the memory of the father of the Railway Mail Service, in 1881, and bearing mute and humble testimony to the appreciation and esteem in which George B. Armstrong was regarded by the loyal postal clerks in the West. It is passing strange that the commercial world has never stopped long enough in its mad rush of money-getting business to pay a fitting tribute to the memory of this man, the direct fruits of whose labor they so universally enjoy. The thought has often occurred to my mind that in our beautiful city of Washington, whose parks and circles are adorned by so many plain and equestrian statues of the heroes of the war, it would only be keeping abreast of civilization to erect an occasional statue to the the memory of some hero of civil and every-day life, and first and foremost among this number should be found a testimonial to George B. Armstrong, who gave to the business and social world the inestimable advantage of the Railway Mail Service.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

William P. Campbell*Ex-Asst. General Superintendent Railway Mail Service*

I entered the railway post office service as a clerk, between Chicago and St. Louis, in January, 1868, and after remaining upon the line a short time, at the earnest request and repeated solicitations of Mr. Armstrong entered the office with him as his clerk. George B. Armstrong was the founder and the father of the Railway Mail Service, and all the arguments and irrelevant statements already printed, and all that may be adduced, cannot alter the fact. I have no desire to take from the memory of William A. Davis of St. Joseph, Missouri, one jot, or tittle of what is due him of credit in his idea for having the overland mail distribution made on the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railway. But it was a conception so marred in detail that to call it the first of the Railway Mail Service, as seen and planned by Colonel Armstrong, is simply to trifle with truth and fact. Mr. Davis' idea originated from an emergency; Colonel Armstrong's, to render impossible any emergency. The first, to relieve an over-crowded post office; the second, to relieve all post offices. The first, to distribute one certain mail going in one certain direction; the second, to distribute all mail going in all directions. The first died with an altered course of the mail; the second has grown and expanded from month to month and year to year, and only long after his death did it reach that full fruition and degree of usefulness which, I know, its founder saw from the start, and which was not, I am sure, seen by any other man at that time.

Mr. Armstrong was located in Chicago. Why? Because the great West was then the rapidly growing portion of this country; its railways building, its business expanding, its towns increasing in size and importance more rapidly than in the East, and here he had greater scope for his work.



At his own request, a second officer was selected to take charge of the railway post offices in the East. This was Harrison Park. When chosen by Mr. Armstrong for this work, he was a route agent between Chicago and Centralia.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

M. J. McGrath

Ex-Assistant Superintendent Railway Mail Service

Among other things, I desire to say:

First: That George B. Armstrong is, in my opinion, entitled to the entire credit of inaugurating the Railway Mail Service.

Second: That it is only by his persistent efforts that the Railway Mail Service became an accomplished fact.

Mr. Armstrong's right to the credit of this great improvement was never questioned by those who were closely identified with him in the work, and who knew of their own knowledge how hard he toiled in the development of the scheme and practically applied it to the mail service of the United States. The claim put forth by some few persons that W. A. Davis, Assistant Postmaster at St. Joseph, Missouri, was the first one who thought of these improvements, I do not think deserves serious consideration; that is, so far as it relates to the present railway postal system.

Entering the service myself in May, 1867, the first railway post office, as I remember it, was established on the Chicago and North-Western Railway, between Chicago and Clinton, Iowa, in the summer of 1864. Asa F. Bradley and P. A. Leonard were the first clerks appointed in the service. The former gentleman, under the supervision of Mr. Armstrong, drew the plans for the original postal-car. The idea of a post office on wheels attracted public attention, and excited great interest among the business men of Chicago before its first and official departure. The successful operation of

the service on this line was so clearly demonstrated that authority was given to Mr. Armstrong by the Department to establish railway post office service on the principal western trunk lines out of Chicago. It was soon after the establishment of the service between Chicago and Clinton, Iowa, that the Department authorized the experiment to be tried on a few of the eastern trunk lines. While the new service in the West had reached a fair state of efficiency, in the East it was still little better than route agencies, and the eastern men engaged at that time in the work readily acknowledged the superiority of this service in the West. This difference was undoubtedly due to the fact that Mr. Armstrong gave his whole time and personal supervision to the improvement of the western service, and coming into personal contact with the men, inspired them with his own zeal and enthusiasm.

It was the practice at this time to wrap every package of letters in wrapping-paper. Even a single letter was so treated and then the package directed in ink. Every postal-car was a warehouse for this brown paper, as it was necessary to have a large supply on hand. The car floor would be so littered with discarded wrappings that many times the clerks stood to their knees in waste paper. Mr. Armstrong conceived the idea of doing away with all this paper and tying the letters in bundles with a plainly addressed letter faced outside. This was an important step towards the improvement of the service, resulting in a great saving of time, labor, and money.

The next important step after the service had been thoroughly established was its formation into a separate bureau, and the calling of Mr. Armstrong to Washington as its head. His first act was to organize the service on a systematic basis, and to this end he divided the country into six districts or divisions, with an official designated "Assistant Superintendent" at the head of each.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

Charles R. Harrison

Railway Postal Clerk

My first acquaintance with George B. Armstrong, formerly General Superintendent of the Railway Mail Service, commenced in April, 1861, at which time he was Assistant Postmaster in the Chicago office, and I was running as mail route agent between Chicago and Oshkosh, Wisconsin, the initial and terminal of a railroad mail route at that time.

In the summer of 1861, I had my first conversation with him relative to the changing or reforming of the system of making up letter mails dispatched from the Chicago post office. He told me at that time that he had asked the Department at Washington for permission to abandon the way-billing of all letters dispatched direct from Chicago to other offices, and that consent had been granted. He was very enthusiastic over it, and made the remark that it "would benefit the boys," meaning the route agents. Their quarters were in the basement of the post office at that time, and the way-bills were stored there for future reference.

During the summer of 1862, I heard him first speak of his plan for distributing mails on railroad cars in transit. He frequently called route agents, who were not on their runs, into his office and submitted to them his grand idea and talked about how it would work. Following some suggestion he had made, he would remark, "Theoretically, it will work, but you boys can tell better than I whether it is practical or not." During the summer of 1864, I saw the plan in manuscript form and heard him read it. It was later printed in pamphlet form by him and submitted for consideration and approval to his old acquaintance, Third Assistant Postmaster-General Zevely. Mr. Armstrong gave me a copy of this pamphlet, and it is now the only one in existence that I have knowledge of.

During the summer and fall of 1862, Mr. Armstrong was

using his best efforts to induce the Department to allow him to try his scheme on some of the railroad lines leading out of Chicago. "But," as he expressed it, "this cruel war requires all their money and time at Washington, and we will have to wait coming events. This war ended, mail will be distributed on railroad cars in transit from Maine to California, and from the Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. The men will do their work in protected cars, and be as safe as if working in the Chicago post office."

In 1865, Mr. Armstrong asked me to assist Route Agent Johnson in planning a mail-car for the Chicago to Green Bay route. I complied, and from these plans the Chicago and North-Western Railway built five convenient full-width 38 feet cars. These cars are in use on their lines to-day. The paper-boxes have been removed and Harrison racks substituted, otherwise they are intact. Mr. Armstrong told me that these were the first cars in the United States built expressly for the railway post office service, although he had ordered cars for the Railway Mail Service improvised out of old cars on the Chicago to Clinton, Iowa, and the Washington to New York lines.

After the death of Mr. Armstrong, his ideas as outlined in his pamphlet were carried out to the letter by Mr. Bangs, as will be seen by reference to that document. In conversation Mr. Bangs always gave Mr. Armstrong the credit of originating the present Railway Mail Service.

OSHKOSH, WIS., 1895.

Jerome B. Johnson

Superintendent of Mails, Milwaukee, Wis.

I regret that I do not wield a ready pen to convey to you, in suitable terms, what I know of those incipient days of the Railway Mail Service, and the struggles and difficulties which George B. Armstrong encountered during a series of years, be-

fore he enlisted the full co-operation of the Department and Congress in his scheme of establishing the Railway Mail Service and putting it on a firm foundation.

The writer was appointed as a route agent on the Chicago and North-Western Railway from Green Bay to Chicago in November, 1863, shortly after which time I became acquainted with Mr. Armstrong, then Assistant Postmaster at Chicago, Ill.

I believe that the inception of the Railway Mail Service in the mind of Mr. Armstrong was due to the receipt in Chicago of the immense army mails coming via Cairo and Louisville. I remember in the spring of 1864, as wagon-loads of No. 1 pouches were unloaded at the Chicago post office, of his remarking, "If we had letter-cases in the mail-cars and an extra clerk, this mail would be all worked up in transit, ready for dispatch on arriving here," and I think that he commenced to work out the scheme then and there.

I cannot give dates, but during the summer of 1864 Mr. Armstrong succeeded in getting letter-cases put in the route agents' cars on the Chicago and North-Western Railway (Chicago to Clinton, and Chicago, Freeport, and Dubuque). Postmasters on these lines received instructions to discontinue making up wrapped packages of letters, but to tie up the way or state mail in one package, marking it No. 1 and the rest No. 2.

During this time, the government was engaged in putting down a gigantic rebellion, or recovering from the shock, and the Department, or Congress, could give Mr. Armstrong but little encouragement or help. The railroad companies acceded to Mr. Armstrong's request by putting in cases for handling the letter mail, but this was the extent of increased car facilities. During the winter of 1866 and 1867 the Department and Congress, under a strong pressure of public opinion for the extension of the Railway Mail Service, seemed to awaken to its importance, and from this time on the success of the service and its ultimate adoption all over the country was

fully assured. During the winter of 1866 and 1867, the Chicago and North-Western Railway (Fort Howard and Chicago), the leading line north and northwest, after more than a year's agitation on the subject, made terms for an equipment of full postal cars for this line, and I received instructions from Mr. Armstrong to prepare the plans for the same. These cars, 38 feet in length, were built, and the service was established on the line May 1, 1867. These cars, I was told by Mr. Armstrong, were the first entire railway postal cars in the service; and I remember the pride which he manifested in showing them to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General, George W. McLellan, who was in Chicago at that time.

MILWAUKEE, WIS., 1895.

Percy A. Leonard

The First Railway Postal Clerk Appointed

When, in the year 1864, George B. Armstrong, at that time Assistant Postmaster at Chicago under John L. Scripps, suggested the abandonment of the old method of billing letters and a direct distribution of all incoming and outgoing mails on the train, the mossbacks laughed incredulously. The vast surplus of mail, estimated to be 500,000 letters, that had accumulated in the distributing department of the Chicago post office during the months of December, 1863, and January and February, 1864, made some extraordinary effort imperative and demonstrated to the analytical mind of Mr. Armstrong the necessity for a radical change in the system then in vogue. By putting on some forty extra distributing-clerks the "blockade" of letters was broken, but the expense and trouble incident to the system remained.

Accordingly, in July, 1864, after much argument and a good deal of negotiation between the Department and the railways, the Chicago and North-Western Railway was induced to

remodel some old cars and put in a rack of pigeonholes for the sake of permitting the experiment of "traveling post offices," as they were at first called. In about sixty days, the required arrangements having been perfected, the foreman of what was known as the "Eastern Room" in the Chicago post office was called upon to detail two of his clerks to go on the road. Mr. Armstrong exacted but two qualifications, accuracy and rapidity of distribution. James Converse and the writer were chosen, and in the latter part of August, 1864, the first car in the United States, equipped and dubbed a traveling post office, left the Wells Street station of the Chicago and North-Western Railway, destined for Clinton, Iowa.

An old mail agent named Bradley, whose hair had grown gray wrestling with mail-bags, was the paper clerk and the writer was the letter clerk. He was not called "head clerk" at that time, probably out of deference to the feelings of the old mail agent. The letters were stacked up in a generous pile on the case. The principal stations only had been put in separate packages. The first series of stations, Austin, etc., were put in a package numbered 1. Distribution began about an hour before the train was due to leave, but, owing to the fact that the arrangement of the boxes was somewhat strange to the distributor, he carried a few letters by some of the nearer stations on the first trip.

It required but a very few trips, however, to demonstrate the immediate success of the scheme, and soon arrangements were perfected for introducing the system on all the railway lines leading out of Chicago, more particularly those running east and west. It was, however, in the summer of 1865 before the railway post office system received the formal official sanction of the Department, and it was introduced on the North-Western, Rock Island, Burlington, Michigan Southern, Fort Wayne, and Michigan Central railroads, in the order named.

From this small beginning in a crude way has grown the present gigantic Railway Mail Service. To George B. Arm-

The True Railway Mail Service

strong belongs the sole credit of its conception. The details were originated and wrought out by him. He was a quick, keen man, full of nervous force and energy. He was a man who could not travel in ruts, but was constantly seeking some better and shorter way of accomplishing the aims of the Post Office Department than the clumsy and slow-going methods in vogue when he entered the service.

DENVER, COL., 1895.

R. F. McCullough *Railway Postal Clerk*

George B. Armstrong was the organizer of the Railway Mail Service. To this work Mr. Armstrong gave his personal attention, often going over the routes in the postal-cars, that the experience of the clerks and his own observations might be of benefit to the service. I was among the first appointed to this service, my appointment being dated September 6, 1865, beginning service September 10th, same year, on the Quincy and St. Joseph railway post office.

I enclose my original appointment papers herewith. It is an odd paper and will be of value in your history. As you will see, we had no instructions then, only those written.

QUINCY, ILL., 1895.

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT, R. P. O.,
CHICAGO, ILL., September 6, 1866.

SIR: You are selected as clerk in the railway post office on the railway line from Quincy, Ill., to St. Joseph, Mo.

You are selected for this responsible position upon the condition that the duties belonging to the railway post office are satisfactorily performed, and the efficiency of the service promoted by a faithful devotion of your personal skill, energy, and intelligence to the work; that the rules, regulations, and instructions of the Post Office Department are strictly obeyed; that a correct distribution of the mails is made in such a manner as you may be instructed, from time to time, by the

General Supt. of Railway Post Offices, or by his assistant, or the head clerk in charge of the Railway P. O. for the time, and that due connecting of the mails distributed by you be made as far as practicable in order that the public may have the full benefit originally contemplated by the introduction of the system.

As clerk you will accompany the head clerk, and with him take charge of the mails to and from the respective offices at the termini of your route, and register your name in the "Register of Arrivals" and "Register of Departures" of railway clerks, with the actual hour and minute of your arrival at and departure therefrom, unless when, in case of departure, it is a necessity that you should precede the mails to the train, which must first be sanctioned by the postmaster where the necessity occurs. It is, however, laid down as a rule that all R. P. O. clerks shall accompany the mail to and from the ends of their respective routes, to record their names as having been actually on duty at the time specified, excepting in such cases where the Department, the Gen'l Supt., his assistant, or a P. M. at either one of the terminal offices of route may, for sufficient reasons, make an exception for the time being.

It is especially enjoined upon all Railway P. O. clerks to observe, in their official intercourse with the public and with each other, the strictest courtesy, and to obey the official instructions of their respective head clerks in charge.

Railway P. O. clerks, of whatever grade, must endeavor, by intelligent effort, to promote the positive interests of the service and the public.

Disobedience or neglect of rules and instructions, or departure from official propriety, will subject the offender to removal.

The P. M. at St. Joseph will arrange the order in which the clerks are to run, and designate the head clerk with whom you will be associated, to whom you will report for duty.

The railway distributing service will be commenced on this route September 10th, and you will be governed accordingly.

Very truly yours,

G. B. ARMSTRONG,

Sp'l Ag't & Gen'l Supt.

R. F. McCULLOUGH,

St. Joseph, Mo.

R. P. O.

John A. Montgomery*Superintendent of Mails, Chicago, Ill.*

I first met George B. Armstrong in the winter of 1865, in company with Colonel J. H. Wickizer. We called upon him at the old Government Building in Chicago. After passing a few commonplace remarks, Mr. Armstrong began telling us of the great revolution the distribution of the mails in transit would make, the vast relief it would be to all distributing post offices and that he had gone far enough with experiments to be fully satisfied of the entire practicability of the new service, but that his only fear was that Congress would not appropriate sufficient money to enable him to establish the service on a sufficient number of lines to fully convince the department and the business public of the benefits sure to follow.

Mr. Armstrong talked with great fervor and seemed very enthusiastic over what he repeatedly termed "his plan." Colonel Wickizer, at that time a special agent of the Post Office Department, observed that it seemed to him the cost would be so great that Congress would hardly be justified in appropriating the necessary money to place the traveling post office on a large number of lines.

Mr. Armstrong took from his desk a package of letters and papers, and read aloud from several of the letters, which were from one or more of the Assistants Postmaster-General; all of them giving assurance of aid, and offering suggestions and asking questions regarding the new service. In nearly every one of those letters the subject of cost was referred to, and Mr. Armstrong was asked if it would not be feasible to take a greater number of clerks from the distributing post offices and place them in the traveling post offices, and thus keep the cost of this particular branch of the service within what it would be practicable for the Postmaster-General to

use from the general appropriation for the department, for the gradual extension of this service. After reading from these letters, Mr. Armstrong quoted from letters which he had written in answer (copies of which he had), showing, to his satisfaction at least, how the increased expense was to be met.

After this meeting I did not see Mr. Armstrong again until early in February, 1866, when I was appointed a railway postal clerk, and had the pleasure of seeing him frequently. As I was now a member of the service, I took a deep interest in its workings and development; hence, every word he had to say on that subject was of great weight and importance to me. How clear his conception of the needs of the time, and what was necessary to fully meet those needs, is evidenced by the almost perfect service of to-day. His orders to us, as clerks, comprehended a mastery over details which seemed impossible to one who had not had an actual experience as a clerk. His talks to us all showed that he was not experimenting as to results, but he knew beyond doubt what he wanted done, and was able to tell us how to do it.

The foundation of all the regulations covering the Railway Mail Service to-day can be seen in the orders issued by Mr. Armstrong as Superintendent and General Superintendent.

The time was propitious, the necessities pressing, and Mr. Armstrong, with his energy, intelligence, and creative genius was the Moses who was to lead the government to better things. To him, and him alone, is due the organization, first practical trial, and development of a system that has broadened and grown in the esteem and confidence of the American people until it is justly recognized as the most important branch of the greatest and best post office establishment extant.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

Hiram J. Skeels*Railway Postal Clerk.*

At the time of the conception of the Railway Mail Service I was Assistant Postmaster at the post office of Onarga, Illinois. My duties while in that position gave me a fair knowledge of the postal business as performed under the old route agent system, and I was frequently called upon by the agents on this line to fill their runs. In doing this service I was often obliged to remain over a day in Chicago, and in this way became personally acquainted with George B. Armstrong. Being often thrown in personal contact with him and hearing his plans discussed at length, I was deeply impressed with the idea of a post office on wheels, as advanced by him.

About the month of July, 1864, if I remember correctly, Mr. Armstrong received instructions from the Department to detail a route agent from one of the lines terminating at Chicago, to assist him in preparing plans for his work. For this purpose he assigned Harrison Park as his assistant, and I in turn received an appointment in July of that year, as distributing clerk in the Chicago post office, to act as route agent, vice Mr. Park, transferred. I remained on the Illinois Central run until January, 1864, at which time I received at the hands of Mr. Armstrong a regular appointment as route agent, Mr. Armstrong remarking at the time, that in the event of a failure in his plans for "a post office on wheels" on this line, I should resign my appointment as route agent, provided Mr. Park desired to resume his old place on the road.

I was afterward appointed railway postal clerk on the same line when the service was established thereon in 1865. I could not fail to become impressed with the earnestness and intrepidity with which the founder of the service entered upon its organization. Obstacles which seemed insurmount-

able were surely overcome, but not without the hardest work on his part. The greatest obstacle which presented itself to Mr. Armstrong in his endeavors to secure recognition for his plans was in the Post Office Department at Washington. At the same time, the railroad companies approached with a view to securing proper equipment could not or would not, with one or two exceptions, see the utility of the system and the benefits to be derived therefrom. The Department could not see a satisfactory return for the outlay involved, and it took much argument and persuasion, together with the assistance of influence, to secure the consent of the Department for the trial of the service that was granted. Only one railroad company, the Chicago and North-Western, had sufficient confidence in Mr. Armstrong's project to consent to fit up a car after plans furnished by him, this car being placed in service between Chicago, Ill., and Clinton, Iowa. If I remember rightly, the letter-cases in this car were taken from the Chicago post office for this trial. Necessarily the appointments of this infant service were crude and imperfect, but with its natural growth and development, conveniences not then obtainable have been applied. I cannot see, however, that the service of to-day differs from the service as first organized, only as affected by minor details. The great and central idea, that of a distributing post office on wheels, as instituted and developed by Mr. Armstrong, and the fundamental principles governing the service, are still the same.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

Maurice Crean

Railway Postal Clerk

I entered the postal service in October, 1853, when the late Isaac Cook was Postmaster in this city. Shortly afterwards George B. Armstrong became the chief, Mr. Cook's time being

so much occupied with politics and affairs that he found it impossible to attend to all the duties devolving on him. Mr. Armstrong soon brought order out of chaos by his superior knowledge of the business.

When I entered the service a part of my route was the Lake Superior region, in the mining districts surrounding that great inland sea. I made up the mail for the upper peninsula of Michigan and tagged the pouches once a month. The mail matter was loaded at the Green Bay post office, and thence was taken on dogs-sleds under the care of a route agent, in snow-shoes and arctic boots, over glare ice to the point of destination. On one occasion as the sled was unloaded at Ontonagon a nest of mice was discovered therein. No doubt, the parental couple burrowed themselves into the pouch in the Green Bay post office while waiting the departure of the agent, and it took him four weeks after his departure to reach the town of Hancock.

I remember vividly how heartily Mr. Armstrong laughed when he was informed the following month that the mail matter was delayed so long at the Green Bay post office that a pair of mice had time to propagate their kind in the pouches. It was then he said to me that he thought he would have to devise some plan by which the mails could be moved so rapidly that mice would not have time to breed in transit. I have no doubt in the world that this mouse incident did a great deal in calling his attention to the unnecessary delays that were experienced in transporting the mails in the then unsettled localities. He then and there said to me that he was determined to give the little depredators no other chance in the future for a recurrence of such a violation of the rules of the Post Office Department. Mr. Armstrong at once secured a change in the method of serving the people of the Lake Superior country and caused the mail to be made up twice, instead of once a month, and had the old foot-messenger abolished and his place taken by a mounted horseman, who carried the letter mail from the Green

Bay post office to Ontonagon. After this incident Mr. Armstrong devoted every moment of his spare time to the organization of plans to secure a more rapid transmission of mails.

He unfolded to me a plan over which he had brooded for many months, by which the mails could be delivered all over the country in much less time than was then required. Long after this, an experimental postal car over that branch of the Chicago and North-Western Railway known as the Chicago and Clinton, Iowa, line was put on and the success of his idea was immediately conclusively demonstrated. This was in 1864.

After the outbreak of the Rebellion, Mr. Armstrong took me to Cairo, Ill., which the late Montgomery Blair, then Postmaster-General, had raised to the rank of a distributing post office to accommodate the vast army and navy mails, and gave me charge of the western room. From time to time as some new idea suggested itself to him, Mr. Armstrong would discuss with me the emanations of his teeming brain. Many a sleepless night did he spend in his room in the St. Charles Hotel at Cairo elaborating the details of his plans, and during the weeks of his sojourn in Cairo I often wondered how he maintained his health in the "dismal swamp" for want of much needed and invigorating repose. During those weeks of unrelenting toil he perfected his arduous labors so completely that a letter mailed in Chicago for any one in the western or southwestern armies reached its terminal point as soon as a passenger on the fastest train could reach it; so that a letter for Admiral Porter from the Navy Department in Washington was made up in the Chicago distributing post office in a separate pouch and reached his flag-ship, via the Illinois Central Railway, as soon as the admiral's gunner himself could have reached him from this city.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

Nelson G. Summerfield*Railway Postal Clerk*

We should all do honor to the memory of George B. Armstrong, for to his untiring energy and fruitful mind are we indebted for the magnificent system of Railway Mail Service in operation throughout the length and breadth of our land to-day.

I remember well his early struggles with the skeptical minds of others who were slow to see the dawn that was already breaking over the firmament, and which was to establish a new era in the mail service of the country, and at the same time stamp George B. Armstrong as one of the greatest benefactors of his time. Though slow to act, the government finally recognized the importance of this measure, and it was my good fortune to be among the first railway mail employees selected to illustrate Mr. Armstrong's theory, the success of which is now a matter of history. And as an evidence of the thorough mastery of the subject in the mind of Mr. Armstrong, it is a remarkable fact that very little improvement, or necessity for improvement, in this service has been made since his time.

I make this statement from an intimate knowledge of the facts in the case, as at the time Mr. Armstrong was making the most strenuous efforts to have his theory given a trial he held the position of Assistant Postmaster at Chicago, and I was a clerk in the distributing department of the Chicago post office. I was consequently brought in daily contact with him, and he, upon several occasions and in a most enthusiastic manner, outlined his theory as to the requirements of the service and the incalculable benefits to be derived therefrom.

I was appointed a clerk on the Chicago and Centralia railway post office line, January 23, 1866, and commenced duty with the establishment of the service on that line, the clerks being selected by Mr. Armstrong as the lines were put in operation.

While connected with the service, I witnessed its growth, from two clerks to 5,000 clerks or more, and during that time have seen many important changes; but I fail to note in a single instance a radical departure from the theory as promulgated by Mr. Armstrong, and I therefore repeat, that we should all do honor to the memory of George B. Armstrong as the founder of the Railway Mail Service.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

Manning S. Poole

Railway Postal Clerk

I was appointed to fill the position of postal clerk on the run between Chicago, Ill., and Burlington, Iowa, in December, 1864. Prior to that date George B. Armstrong had spent some time in Washington laboring with the Department in his endeavors to secure recognition for his plans for the establishment of a complete Railway Mail Service in the United States, and finally secured authority to start three lines in the West, as an experiment. The first and really experimental line was placed on the Chicago and North-Western Railway, between Chicago, Ill., and Clinton, Iowa. One of the lines early chosen was the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railway. After the service on the C. B. & Q. had been in operation a few months, a pronounced opposition and hostility arose against it among the members of Congress through whose district the line passed, arising from a feeling that they would not be allowed a fair political representation among the men selected to fill the appointments on this road, and who opposed the measure on purely political grounds.

With the appointment of Governor Denison to the office of Postmaster-General, the attack on Mr. Armstrong was renewed and in order to ascertain if the service was really a benefit to the people of the country served thereby, instructions were issued to Mr. Armstrong to communicate with the Postmaster

at each head office served by the new system, and to secure by letter his opinion of the results, practical or otherwise, derived from the service. Blanks were accordingly prepared and issued to each Postmaster at the offices concerned. On my return to Chicago the week following the time at which these inquiries were instituted, I found that the replies received from all offices were eminently satisfactory to Mr. Armstrong, and as afterwards proved, to the Post Office Department. The reply from the Postmaster at Burlington, Iowa, Fox Abrahams, I remember, was very enthusiastic and emphatic in its praise of the new service.

Previous to the time of the actual installation of the service, I was a clerk in the distributing department of the Chicago post office, Mr. Armstrong being at that time Assistant Postmaster. For a long time prior to the actual realization of his plans, Mr. Armstrong had been agitating the advancement of the postal service in the United States, knowing that this country was far behind other countries in respect to its postal facilities. In a conversation with me he once remarked that when explaining his ideas and methods before both Congressional committees, he urged a greater liberality in the establishment of a railway postal system as adapted to our republic than was granted under the monarchies of the old world.

Some time in February, 1865, I was ordered to accompany Mr. Armstrong on a trip to Cairo, Ill. His purpose was the organization of postal service on the main line of the Illinois Central Railway between Columbus, Ky., and Freeport, Ill., and also on the Chicago branch of the same railroad from Cairo to Chicago, Ill. An experimental line was then in operation on the Clinton division of the Chicago and North-Western Railway, as I have before stated.

My close and intimate acquaintance with Mr. Armstrong gave me a clear insight into his character, and a perfect conception of his desires in conjunction with the workings of the Rail-

way Mail Service. He was satisfied that this system was the only one that could be adapted to this country.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

John E. Thomas

Railway Postal Clerk

I entered the postal service in August, 1864, and I have been in the service continuously since to the present day. As one of the oldest clerks in the service (there are few of the men who were associated with Mr. Armstrong in the early days of his great work that are yet alive), I take pleasure in contributing what I may to a eulogy of his useful life.

In the year 1868, I received notice from him that I had been promoted from a route agency, the position to which I was originally appointed, to a head clerkship on the railway post office line from Bloomington to Freeport, Ill. I was brought in close association with Mr. Armstrong during the establishment of the railway post office on this road. He was truly one of nature's noblemen, broad-minded, large-hearted, and with a sympathetic nature for all. There was not an obstacle too large for him to overcome in his labor of pushing his plan to a successful culmination, and the enthusiasm that he showed on every occasion inspired every one with the same quality. He seemed to have, at the time I became acquainted with him, but one aim in life: to make the Railway Mail Service a complete success. He talked about it continuously; was always devising improvements; was ever ready to receive suggestions and was a living example at all times and in all places of the power of an earnest man whose life was directed to the achievement of a grand result.

But more can be said, and this more is the greatest praise that can be paid to Mr. Armstrong's perspicacity and his intellectual breadth. The service of to-day is the same service that he left when he died. In general outline, in its larger

phase, in its fundamentals, no improvements, that I can see, have been made. And if they had been, I am sure they would have been brought to my attention. Indeed, the large and expansive brain of George B. Armstrong seemed to cover not only all the necessities of the early times but to take in the future development of the service.

BLOOMINGTON, ILL., 1895.

Edgar Isbell

Railway Postal Clerk

I entered the Railway Mail Service in April, 1865, receiving my appointment through the hands of George B. Armstrong, then Superintendent, with head quarters at Chicago. I was appointed to the run between Chicago and St. Louis, being one of the crew to take the first run made on that line. Previous to receiving an appointment as mail agent, the term then used, I was for a time a letter-distributor in the Chicago post office. Our accommodations on the Chicago and St. Louis line were of the most meager kind, the postal apartment being limited to a portion of a baggage-car fixed up to suit the demands of the service, even this space being secured through hard work on the part of Mr. Armstrong. As I remember the relations between the Department and the railroad companies, the latter were not inclined to put much confidence in the scheme for handling and distributing the mails en route. The concessions granted by the railroad companies would not, I am sure, have been granted at that time but for the untiring efforts and indomitable spirit exhibited by Mr. Armstrong in his official intercourse with them, this spirit finally overcoming the opposition under which the service was started.

The beginnings of the great service seem, to look back from the present, very crude and simple, but in the minds of those who took an active part in its organization and commencement the possibilities of the future warranted the brightest and most

sanguine expectations. It must be remembered that the use of a whole car for postal purposes was hardly dreamed of by ordinary minds, but I know that Mr. Armstrong had, as a part of his scheme, the idea of a full postal-car as we find it to-day; and it is surprising to note how few changes there have been in the details of the service during the twenty-four years that have elapsed since his death. The plans of the service were so carefully elaborated and improved by him before he made the practical test, that with but few minor alterations and additions the service to-day in its larger aspect is no more and no less than the service that he gave to the country during his useful life.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

Isaac A. Crane

Railway Postal Clerk

I first became acquainted with George B. Armstrong, October 15, 1865. At that time I received notice from Mr. Armstrong to the effect that I had been appointed a railway postal clerk, and was requested to report at his office for instructions as soon as possible. I called on Mr. Armstrong personally, and from him received instructions as to my duties in the new position that I was to occupy, and was assigned to a run on the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway, between Chicago, Ill., and Davenport, Iowa. I remained on this run four or five years, and from there was transferred to the Chicago and St. Louis line, performing service thereon some six or seven years.

During my early connection with the Railway Mail Service I was thrown in frequent personal contact with Mr. Armstrong, and had many conversations with him in regard to the service as then constituted, and its future development. In his conversations, in which were outlined his plans for the extension and development of the system, Mr. Armstrong seemed to have the grandest conceptions of all that should constitute a perfect

postal service, and I am constrained to say that in my opinion the method and appliances of the present day are simply an expression of the original plan as conceived in the brain of Mr. Armstrong, and inaugurated by him as the first Superintendent.

CHICAGO, ILL., 1895.

An Historic Letter

(From the Chicago Post Office Bulletin, November 4, 1899.)

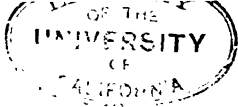
The very interesting letter, of which the following is a copy, was loaned to the Postmaster by George B. Armstrong, eldest son of the late George B. Armstrong, founder of the Railway Mail Service. Samuel Hoard, the writer of this historic letter, was appointed Postmaster of Chicago on March 9, 1865. He was a warm friend of Mr. Armstrong, who was first appointed Assistant Postmaster of the Chicago office in 1854. In 1856 Mr. Armstrong resigned that position to go into business with Rufus Hatch, of New York. In the great panic of 1857 the firm failed. In 1858 Mr. Armstrong again became Assistant Postmaster, and held that office uninterruptedly until 1865.

POST OFFICE, CHICAGO, ILL., April 20, 1865.
HON. WILLIAM DENISON, Postmaster-General,

Washington, D. C.

SIR: Permit me to address you in regard to a subject I deem very important to the postal service of the United States on railroads. You may not be personally acquainted with George B. Armstrong, of this city, nor aware that he has acted for many years as Assistant Postmaster at Chicago, in which position his mind was directed to the question of the feasibility of effecting a distribution of mail matter on railroad trains, so that such matter would reach its destination from twelve to twenty-four hours in advance of the time required if the matter should be distributed according to the ordinary established mode. I have no hesitancy in saying that the plans devised by Mr. Armstrong have been of very great public utility, and if they could be generally extended throughout the country the value and importance of the system could be fully appreciated and as fully approved by the public.

Mr. Armstrong has been Assistant Postmaster at this place,



The True Railway Mail Service

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and at the same time held the appointment of special railroad agent, and in assuming the duties of Postmaster here I considered that the two positions were so far incompatible with each other that I could not, with any sense of propriety, permit their being combined in the same person; and though I felt that Mr. Armstrong's services would be very desirable as Assistant Postmaster here, yet they would be indispensable to the postal service in perfecting the railway system.

With the corps of efficient clerks now in this office, educated under Mr. Armstrong's able supervision, I do not deem it very difficult to find a gentleman competent for the position of Assistant Postmaster, while his loss to the postal service in perfecting the railroad system would be almost irreparable.

I would, therefore, most earnestly recommend that Mr. Armstrong be retained in the position of special railroad agent, or that he be appointed to one of the places designed to be filled pursuant to the provisions of subdivision 5 of the act relating to postal laws, approved March 3, 1865, and that his salary should correspond to the importance of the position and the eminent, if not unequaled, ability that Mr. Armstrong will bring to its performance.

I have the honor to be,

Very respectfully yours,

SAMUEL HOARD,

Postmaster.

Schuyler Colfax's Address

Oration of the Ex-Vice-President of the United States at the Dedication of the George B. Armstrong Monument in Chicago, in May, 1881

(Reprinted from the Chicago Inter Ocean, May 20, 1881)

Fellow-Citizens: I come with great pleasure from my Indiana home to join with these postal officials and the business men of this great city of the Northwest in the dedication of this bust and monument. We have monuments in our Republic for the great commanders of the army and navy, for distinguished statesmen and eloquent orators, for the heroes of science and art, for daring leaders in discovery, and for brilliant exemplars in philanthropy; and we come together to-day to attest to the present and the future, to our own generation and to posterity, how much we owe to George B. Armstrong, of Chicago, whose bronze bust, erected by the postal clerks of the Railway Mail Service, we inaugurate in this most appropriate place.

The vast army mails came into the Chicago distributing post-office, of which Mr. Armstrong was the Assistant Postmaster, in immense masses, filling its rooms and bags to overflowing. And sometimes, with its heavy office-work proper, they were one, two, and even three weeks behind in their distribution and forwarding. To remedy this glaring defect, so full of sadness to our soldiers so far away, and to their families suffering the agonies of distress at home, was the idea which suggested itself to Mr. Armstrong's active and fertile mind. Indeed, it took possession of him literally, and for months he gave nearly all of his waking hours and sleepless nights to the problem. One plan after another was conceived, considered, and rejected



THE GEORGE B. ARMSTRONG MEMORIAL
At the Adams Street Entrance of the Government Building, Chicago.

as impracticable or inadequate. But at last the true thought flashed upon him, and the germ of the present system came into existence in his mind. Slowly but surely, patiently but persistently, he elaborated and perfected it and then, full of this new idea, he determined to submit it in person to the President and Postmaster-General, Vice-President and Speaker [*who was Schuyler Colfax*], Senate and House of Representatives. Some few finally yielded to his enthusiastic explanations of it. But at first he met obstacles in every direction that would have cooled down any one less determined. The greatly increased expense, the tendency of officials to adhere to what had been tested, the common disposition to doubt the untried, all were against him. How many weary journeys he made to Washington during the closing years of President Lincoln's first term, how many arguments he submitted for his new scheme before the Senate and House post office committees and government officials, how his quenchless enthusiasm at last enlisted Mr. Lincoln's admiration and support, how he finally triumphed over all the multitudinous objections that were such stumbling-blocks in his pathway, I can only refer to in this single sentence.

Fortunately, his indomitable will sustained him. His zeal was supplemented and reinforced by his most admirable character; and the indisputable merit of his plan, which he was able to vindicate and maintain triumphantly, against all cavil and opposition, carried it through Congress. And with the authority he had thus fairly extorted from our law-makers by his persuasive appeals and energetic determination, he returned to Chicago to organize what he feared might be the still more difficult task of putting it into successful operation.

The first experiment of Railway Mail Service, under Mr. Armstrong's new idea, was in August, 1864, and to the Chicago and North-Western Railway belongs the credit of the first opportunity for its practical exemplification. The railway companies, at that time, looked with undisguised disfavor on the

new plan. It needed more than one man in each postal car; and would evidently require more elaborate cars with enlarged space and better accommodations. But the officers of the Chicago and North-Western Railway finally yielded to Mr. Armstrong's persistent importunities. A letter-case was put into an old route agent's car in which to distribute letters intended for the East, and two men were detailed from the eastern room of the Chicago distributing post office, to see if Mr. Armstrong's theory would really work well in practice. And this route agent's car, fitted up to meet the emergency, and those two clerks, detailed without extra pay from the Chicago post office, formed the feeble beginnings of the great service which to-day extends from ocean to ocean, over the entire railway system of the country.

No sooner had the first experimental line been put into operation than the Post Office Department, the railway companies, and the business men of Chicago, especially, realized that Mr. Armstrong's idea was all that he had claimed it to be; and the obstacles that at first beset him on every side rapidly disappeared. From every mouth came praise and encouragement and good wishes for the grand improvement he had conceived and executed. The new system rapidly proved its great value to the public, and especially to commercial interests. Two cars, imperfect in their conveniences, and really laughable when compared with the handsomely furnished postal cars of to-day, were placed on the Chicago and North-Western Railway, between Chicago and Clinton, Ia., and immediately the service upon that line and connected roads became more complete than had ever been enjoyed, or even thought of, except in the mind of the originator of the Railway Mail Service. Then followed the service on the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railway, that being the second western railroad that gave hospitable welcome to this great postal improvement.

Mr. Armstrong now insisted that, as in the old cars the clerks

were cramped for room, there must be new ones specially built and arranged for the service. The railroad companies needed no argument at that time to induce them to build new cars, models indeed of comfort and convenience, which quickly superseded the renovated route-agent cars. The first of these new cars was built by the Chicago and North-Western Railway in 1867, after plans especially prepared by Mr. Armstrong, and the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy, the Chicago and Alton, and Illinois Central soon after did likewise.

The same progress being made in rapid succession on the trunk lines at the East, the administration acquiesced in Mr. Armstrong's suggestion that this great work, which was too much for one man to be responsible for, should be made into two divisions, and Mr. Armstrong was placed at the head of the western division, being all the country Northwest of the Ohio. However, he remained practically at the head of the service, constantly planning to increase its efficiency and being daily consulted about the numberless details of the expanding work. Whatever was done to perfect it was done by him. The impress of his active mind, his ambitious will, his energetic labor was stamped upon the whole growth of the Railway Mail Service.

No longer a theory, it had by this time become a grand fact; not merely an idea, but a necessity of our postal system. And when General Grant became President in 1869, the greatness and indispensable character of the service was given by his administration more complete and unreserved official recognition than it had received since its birth. That administration happened to have in its official membership one that had warmly supported Mr. Armstrong's plan from its first revelation by him [*this was Mr. Colfax's modest way of referring to his own valuable assistance in securing recognition for the new service*], and President Grant had also quite early become convinced of its great value. Mr. Armstrong was summoned to

Washington, and by his plans for the future increase of the efficiency of the system, the United States was subdivided into six divisions, at the head of each of which was placed an Assistant Superintendent, all to be under the direction of a General Superintendent, with headquarters at Washington. Mr. Armstrong was made the first General Superintendent in the spring of 1869. Congress made more generous appropriations, and the work was pushed vigorously forward, so that before his death the railway postal system was on every trunk line in the United States. It had been a favorite idea with Mr. Armstrong to have a fast mail service placed upon the trunk line from New York to San Francisco, shortening the mail schedule across the continent at least two days. But while he was elaborating the details of what he intended should be the crowning feature of his system, death overtook him, and his labors were brought to a sudden close. He died in Chicago, May 5, 1871, ten years ago this month, from overwork in his too close application to the wants of the public, and to the service which was the foremost thought and the personal pride of his useful life.

As a postal official Mr. Armstrong was acknowledged by all who knew him to be the ablest of our century. He was intensely alive to the wants of the people, full of energy in everything he undertook, thoroughly acquainted with the workings of the Post Office Department, and generally consulted on all important postal questions. President Lincoln had such faith in his practical wisdom that he urged him personally to go to Europe as our Postal Commissioner, so that the American postal service might have the benefit of his observations and study there. But Mr. Armstrong's own project, the ambition of his life was the Railway Mail Service; and he was too devoted to its success to accept any other honor.

With a nobility of character that impressed all who came in contact with him, he had a mind of great originality and force;

and these grand characteristics, conjoined to his remarkable executive ability, fitted him admirably for the great work which he planned, and which he fortunately lived to see so successfully carried into execution throughout our continental domain. . . .

Early Days of the Railway Mail Service

Address Delivered by Postmaster E. W. Keyes of Madison, Wisconsin, at a Banquet Given to Postmaster-General Smith in Chicago

(From the Chicago Post Office Bulletin, April 25, 1900.)

Postmaster E. W. Keyes, of Madison, Wisconsin, in responding to the toast, "Early Days of the Railway Mail Service," said:

The Post Office Department is of very great importance to the people. It can almost be said to be the most important department of the government. It is nearest the people. Its great advantages are realized, and are constantly before the minds of the people. The people appreciate highly the favors they receive through this source. This branch of the governmental service is more popular than any other department of the government.

We hardly realize the tremendous forward strides which have been made by the post office and mail service since 1861, when Abraham Lincoln became President. The War of Secession succeeded that event; yet the general interests of the people during that period were not neglected. The great interests of the postal service kept on apace and developed into the splendid system which now prevails. There was a wide difference between the old methods and the new methods. The time had arrived when great change was impending, when the needs of the service demanded relief. That relief came almost in the twinkling of an eye. It was decreed that the service with one bound should be placed upon the highest pinnacle of efficiency. The old methods of railway mail transportation were to be relegated to the rear, and a system was to be inaugurated upon a new plan of operation.

One man only had this grand scheme in his mind. He was the late George B. Armstrong, Assistant Postmaster of Chicago. He was the Moses who led the service out of the wilderness into the promised land. And he became the originator of the Railway Mail Service of to-day.

The early days of this service were not always bright and promising. Mr. Armstrong found obstacles in his pathway; prejudices had to be overcome, and the doubters had to be convinced of the practicability of the scheme which he had originated and commended. I was familiar with his struggles, embarrassments, and the difficulties which he encountered. In fact, I was a co-worker with him in pushing the matter forward. His enthusiasm was unbounded; his confidence in his plan was never shaken, and his determination to make it a success never abated. He realized that some one must solve the problem of a better and speedier means for the distribution of the mails. He saw the great necessity for improvement in the transmission and distribution of mail matter. He was equal to the emergency. After he had become fully convinced of the practicability of his scheme of railway mail service, he applied to the Postmaster-General for assistance. After frequent conferences with the authorities on the subject, it was decided to give him an opportunity to test the merits of his project. In pursuance of this decision this letter was addressed to him:

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, D. C., July 1, 1864.

GEORGE B. ARMSTRONG, Chicago, Ill.

SIR: You are authorized to test by actual experiment upon such route or routes as you may select at Chicago the plans proposed by you for simplifying the mail service. You will arrange with the railroad companies to furnish suitable cars for traveling post-offices, designate head offices, with their dependent offices, prepare forms of blanks and instructions for all such offices and those on the railroad not head offices; also for clerks of traveling post-offices.

To aid you in this work, you may select some suitable route agent whose place can be supplied by a substitute at the expense of the Department. When your arrangements are completed you will report them in full.

M. BLAIR,
Postmaster-General.

Armed with this authority, he was not slow in arranging for the test service, though in a primitive manner. His first experiment was tried upon the Chicago and North-Western Railway line from Chicago to Clinton, Iowa, during the summer of the same year. The experiment worked so well and gave such grand satisfaction that in the two years following the service was extended to all other railroads in Illinois.

While this great improvement was going forward and being introduced upon the lines of railroad in Illinois, I was serving my first term of five consecutive terms as Postmaster at Madison. Its great importance attracted my especial attention, and I concluded that if it was a good thing for our neighboring state of Illinois, it was likely to prove a benefit and advantage to my own state, Wisconsin. I had watched the experiment with a great deal of interest. Mr. Armstrong was an old friend of mine in the service, and we worked together in this matter with a hearty co-operation. I realized that it would require a strong pull to introduce the system into Wisconsin, and I went to work in earnest in behalf of the project. And my first step was to draft a memorial addressed to the Postmaster-General, to be passed through our legislature, as follows:

A memorial to the Postmaster-General for the early establishment of the new railway distributing post-office system upon the principal railroads in the state of Wisconsin.

The memorial of the legislature of the state of Wisconsin respectfully represents:

That the important and rapidly increasing business interests of the state of Wisconsin demand the early introduction and establishment of the new railway distributing post office system upon the leading railroads of this state. That under the present

system of distribution of letters at post offices a delay of twelve hours and upwards is necessarily incurred at the Chicago office in the transmission of letters from Wisconsin to eastern cities and other points in the country. That, in the opinion of your memorialists, the new railway mail system is of great practical utility; that its success, whenever and wherever introduced, is beyond question; and that it will confer a great and incalculable benefit and advantage upon the business interests of our state, we fully believe.

Therefore your memorialists would respectfully and earnestly ask its application to the principal railroads in the state of Wisconsin.

It was passed by the legislature of Wisconsin, April 8, 1865, without opposition and was doubtless the first action taken on the subject, and the first indorsement given by any state legislature commending the adoption of the new system. In the mean time I was in frequent communication with Mr. Armstrong as to the best course to pursue. I saw him often and wrote him frequently. I advised him that a memorial had passed the legislature. I read copies of letters received from him at that time:

POST OFFICE, CHICAGO, ILL., April 8, 1865.

FRIEND KEYES: Thanks for your kind favor this morning received. Did you send copies of the legislative memorial to the Postmaster-General and the Assistant Postmaster-General? If not, why not? If not, do so immediately; it will help along amazingly. Flood the Department with them. I go to Washington in a few days.

Yours truly,

G. B. ARMSTRONG.

On April 14th, he wrote me again, in answer to my suggestion that he forward the memorial:

POST OFFICE, CHICAGO, ILL., April 14, 1865.

DEAR KEYES: I feel a delicacy in sending the memorial as coming through me. It may look as if I were making capital for the new work. Please forward it yourself to the Postmaster-

General, marking the envelope inclosing it 'Personal.' I will be in Washington now very soon.

Yours truly,

G. B. ARMSTRONG.

These letters show the great interest which Mr. Armstrong took in the project, and that we pushed it to the fullest extent possible. Mr. Armstrong conferred with the Department on the question of the extension into Wisconsin, and I followed the memorial with correspondence and with personal interviews with the Postmaster-General, and finally received assurances from that official that as soon as practicable this service should be extended into Wisconsin, and on May 1, 1867, the service was put on the Northwestern Railway from Chicago to Green Bay.

Thus it was that Wisconsin became the second state in the Union to receive the advantages of the new system of railway mail distribution. It was not until July 1, 1869, that this service was put upon any railroad running east of Chicago. As I have stated, the first service was put upon the railroad line from Chicago to Clinton. A crude car was prepared and the first trip was begun, and, in the words of Postmaster-General Blair, in his letter of authority to Mr. Armstrong, "the traveling post office" was under full headway. The value of the service was so quickly demonstrated by these experiments that the railroads promptly furnished better and more suitable cars for the purpose. As soon as practicable after the first introduction of the railway distributing post office service, it was made to include the whole country in its benefits and advantages. Congress was not slow to recognize its great value. In 1869 the Railway Mail Service was organized into a separate bureau, and Mr. Armstrong was placed in full control, and so continued until his death, in May, 1871.

No project of so much importance to the people was ever carried forward more rapidly to such grand results, as less than

four years elapsed between the running of the first railway mail-car and the general adoption of the service by the department.

There were not a few others entitled to great credit in heartily supporting Mr. Armstrong in his efforts. I only refer to the early days of the service. Its great accomplishments and splendid results are as familiar as household words to the people. I will not attempt to point out in detail its great triumph. I only speak hurriedly and in a reminiscent way of its early days.

I was an eye-witness, so to speak, of the inception, growth, development, and expansion of this most marvellous addition and improvement of the post office service — the greatest that has been seen in a century. Without it, it would be impossible to transact the great volume of business which floods the mails at the present time.

Mr. Armstrong had been so devoted to this work and so impressed with its magnitude, that his labors in connection therewith overcame him, and he became broken down in health, which was clearly attributable to the nervous energy and attention which he had devoted to it. His name should always be kept in grateful remembrance by the American people.

A large bronze bust on a granite pedestal has been erected by the clerks in the Railway Mail Service to the memory of George Buchanan Armstrong, the founder of this service.

Letters on Postal Reform

**A Proposed Change in the Economy of the Postal Service
of the United States, by George B. Armstrong,
Chicago, Ill.**

(Official History, pages 165-171, inclusive)

The following letters, originally addressed to A. N. Zevely, Third Assistant Postmaster-General, on the subject of reform in the "economy of the postal service in the United States," are published in this form with a view to obtaining an expression of opinion as to the merits of the plan proposed therein and its adaptability to the wants of the service. That a reform is needed is evident to every one practically acquainted with our postal arrangements. In what way this reform is to be attained, these letters are designed to point out. There may be other plans elaborated, if any at all have been, better designed to accomplish the end proposed. However that may be, the author claims a careful consideration of his plan as the partial result of a critical study of the present system during a long experience in the service.

These letters treat only of the disposition and arrangement of the postal system to insure the utmost attainable celerity in the transmission of correspondence through the mails. Other questions are left out of view.

CHICAGO, June, 1864.

No. 1

CHICAGO, May 10, 1864.

SIR: It is a matter of congratulation that an effort is to be made to introduce a reform in the postal system of this country. What this effort will be and what result is contemplated, I am not precisely informed. It is fortunate, however, that whatever effort is made is to be under your able and experienced management.

The present postal system, no doubt adapted to the simple requirements of the service in its early days, when the accounts of the Department were comprised in the £ s. d. ledger kept by the Postmaster-General, is inadequate to the enlarged demands of the advanced civilization of the present day. It ought to be replaced by a system combining greater simplicity with cheapness and adaptability to the avowed ends to be accomplished by its introduction. Although it would doubtless be difficult to a certain degree to introduce a system under the present precarious tenure of office which would at once violently revolutionize the order of things, yet such changes may be made as would gradually, yet effectually, accomplish the purpose, retaining so much of the present system as would not bring improvements into too sudden conflict with long habit and practice.

Among those practically conversant with the present method of making up mails, some of the objections against its continuance are a want of compactness, a diffuseness, so to speak, in the system of mailing direct to the extent required by the existing regulations of the Department, the length of time required for post-billing, filling out and completing the records, wrapping and directing the packages, and in bagging, especially in the large offices; the necessity, therefore, of closing the mails at the post-office to the local public at an unseemly length of time before the actual time of departure of the mails from the post office, and the consequent liability to make errors in distributing and directing packages in haste, which generally attends the operation. The latter objection has the more force from the fact that no small amount of misdirected packages, as is well known to the post office, daily travel in the mails, which under the regulations may be opened only at the post offices addressed. Add to these the cost of wrapping paper used, post-bills, and other blanks in enormous quantities, with the unavoidable waste attending their use, and the objections gather weight on the score of economy of time and cost. These may be regarded as minor points in a comprehensive plan, but on the score of economy of time and cost, one of sufficient importance to start the inquiry whether such changes in the arrangement, regulation, and government of the system can be introduced as would bring about a permanent benefit in these respects, and for the greater purpose of freeing the

system of its present perplexities and hindrances, for the public welfare. The great fact of reform, however, lies beyond these, and may be reached, probably, only through progressive steps in the work of improvement.

Certainty and celerity in the transmission of letters are primary considerations. No postal system may be regarded as perfect that does not give to the whole public the largest possible facilities in extent and frequency of communication between all important places and rapid frequent local deliveries. All parts of our country are closely identified with each other in a great common interest — the fullest development of commercial and social prosperity. In the attainment of this grand result the post office performs an important part; to it are committed great trusts and from it are expected the highest advantages to the people. The working out of this reformation in the service is second in universal interest to no other measure touching the welfare of the public at large. This final result may be attained by wise planning and patient, persistent effort, beginning the reform with the simplest changes, for the reason hereinafter named, and gradually introducing the more radical improvements till the end is accomplished.

No. 2

CHICAGO, May 14, 1864.

DEAR SIR: The outline of the plan which I submit for your consideration for a change in the present postal system to secure greater efficiency, certainty, and celerity therein, I will state as briefly as I can to be rightly understood. I premise it by saying that the improvements I propose look to the abolition of the system of mailing direct to the extent now required by the existing regulations of the Post Office Department, and the substitution therefor of a system of distributing on the lines of railroads by railway clerks for offices on railroad routes, and by those offices for other offices supplied from them; the introduction of a system of multiplied and frequent interchange of mails between places of important intercommunication, and, finally, a full transfer of distributing duties, as near as may be to traveling railway post offices, in order to secure the utmost dispatch and frequency in the transmission of letters. I elucidate under the following heads, viz.:

1. Classification of post offices.

2. Traveling post offices.
3. The duties of each class of offices.
4. The duties of traveling post offices.
5. The method of making up and post-billing mails.

I.— CLASSIFICATION OF POST OFFICES

Post offices should be divided into four classes, viz.:

Distributing offices.

Assorting offices.

Head (or supply) offices.

Route (or intermediate) offices.

Distributing offices shall be such post offices as may be designated by the Postmaster-General, to be determined by geographical situation, with reference to population, the frequency of local supplies to and from such offices, and the importance of the correspondence, the frequency of communication with other important offices, and such other considerations bearing on the case as may be deemed of sufficient consequence to make them serviceable to the greatest practicable extent in the design of their selection.

Assorting offices shall be those post offices which are the initial and terminal offices of railroad routes, not distributing offices, and such other offices and railroad routes as may be located at railroad crossings or connections, and such other offices on other routes, not railroad routes, as may be deemed expedient by the Postmaster-General.

Head (or supply) offices shall be all post offices which are the initial and terminal offices of routes, not railroad routes, not distributing or assorting offices, excepting such terminal offices as are not the offices of supply for any route, and excepting also such offices, either head or terminal offices, of such routes, as may be deemed expedient by the Postmaster-General.

Route (or intermediate) offices shall be all other post offices situated on railroad, and other routes which are not offices of supply for any other route.

II.— TRAVELING POST OFFICES

The classification of offices above given is for the twofold purpose of arranging a system of mailing combining more comprehensiveness and simplicity than the present one, and thereby to attain greater accuracy in the dispatch of letters. And in

the case of distributing offices the design in the classification is so to relieve them of the vast amount of letters now necessarily thrown upon them under the present system as to enable them, together with the assorting offices in the classification given, to make more extended and frequent interchange of mail with other offices of the same classification, both for local delivery and distribution. But the main feature of the plan which after its introduction and final adaption to the service would undoubtedly lead to the most important results is the system of railway distribution. To carry out the true theory of postal service, there should be no interruption in the transit of letters in the mail, and, therefore, as little complication in the necessary internal machinery of a postal system as possible, to the end that letters deposited in a post office at the latest moment of the departure of the mails from the office for near or distant places should travel with the same uninterrupted speed and certainty as passengers to their places of destination as often as contracts with the Department for transportation of the mails permit. It is well known to the public that passengers traveling over railroad routes generally reach a given point in advance of letters, when to that given point letters must pass, under the present system, through a distributing office; and when letters are subjected to a distributing process in more than one distributing office, as is largely the case now, the tardiness of a letter's progress toward its place of destination is proportionately increased. But a general system of railway distribution obviates this difficulty. The work being done while the cars are in motion, and transfers of mails made from route to route and for local deliveries on the way as they are reached, letters attain the same celerity in transit as persons making direct connections. This is obvious; but to reach this perfection would necessarily be a work of time. The plan I now submit looks to that end in time; and if it be proved by trial to be adapted to the service in a new form, the time may not be distant.

In passing, however, to this final improvement, I remark that the classification of offices above given would be so far changed as to abolish the distinction between distributing and assorting offices, reducing the former to the character with the simple functions of the latter. The other question of frequent local deliveries in cities and towns by carriers I will not touch upon,

only so far as to say that the two questions are correlative; and that the success of one depends upon the perfection and thoroughness of the other. To carry out the design, therefore, each railroad corporation under contract with the Post Office Department, or otherwise, employed in transporting the mails shall furnish for the exclusive use and occupancy of the railway clerks a sufficient number of cars suitable in dimensions and conveniences as may be deemed necessary for the proper discharge of distributing and other duties; these cars, or railway post offices, to be under the direction and control of the Department while the corporation is engaged in carrying the mail.

III.—THE DUTIES OF EACH CLASS OF OFFICES

Adopting the classification proposed above, the duties of the several offices therein will be readily understood.

The duty of route offices will be very simple. Postmasters of such offices not on railroad routes will post-bill and mail direct all letters for offices on other routes (without reference to any indorsement thereon by the writers to the contrary); they will post-bill and mail on the nearest head office on the proper route to the place of their destination.

When route offices are situated on railroad routes the postmasters thereof will post-bill and mail letters for other offices on their own routes, as well as letters for offices on other routes on the traveling post office through which they should first pass to the office of delivery.

The duty of head offices will be equally as simple as that of route offices.

Postmasters of head offices will post-bill and mail all letters deposited therein for mailing and received from other offices in the manner following:

All letters for offices on the routes of which such offices are the head offices will be mailed and post-billed direct; and all letters for offices on other routes will be post-billed and mailed on the traveling post office, the nearest assorting office, or head office on the proper route to the office of delivery, as the case may be, in the same manner as route offices.

The duties of assorting offices will be of a more general character than those of either of the above offices; and, although confined to narrow limits in their operations, they will have many of the characteristics of distributing offices.

Postmasters of assorting offices will post-bill and mail all letters deposited therein for mailing and received from other offices in the manner following:

All letters for offices on routes not railroad routes of which such offices are the initial or terminal offices will be post-billed and mailed direct.

All letters for offices on other routes not railroad routes, excepting routes supplied through head offices on railroad routes, will be post-billed and mailed on the nearest head office on the proper route to the offices of delivery.

All letters for offices on railroad routes for which such offices are the assorting offices, and for offices supplied through head offices on railroad routes, will be post-billed and mailed on the traveling post offices. And all letters for offices on other routes, railroad or otherwise, which should properly pass over such railroad routes to the offices of delivery, excepting those which should be sent to distributing offices, other assorting offices, or other traveling post offices, as the case may be, with which regular exchange of mail in through bags is made, will be post-billed and mailed on the traveling post office.

It will also be the duty of this class of offices to make regular exchange of mails in through bags with other principal assorting offices, distributing offices, and traveling post offices, as far as may be deemed expedient for the purpose — first, of expediting the transmission of letters for such offices and for offices supplied through them; secondly, to secure semi-daily dispatch of mails, or as often as contract with the Post Office Department for the transportation of mails permit it, between important places; and, thirdly, to lessen the amount of distribution in the traveling post offices.

All letters, therefore, for places immediately supplied from either of the offices with which regular exchange of mails in through bags is made will be post-billed and mailed on the office from which the supply is due; and letters for places beyond the offices with which such exchange of mail is made shall be mailed on the last exchanging office on the proper route to the offices of delivery.

Postmasters of distributing offices will post-bill and mail all letters deposited therein for mailing and received from other offices for distribution in the manner following:

All letters for offices on routes not railroad routes of which

such offices are the initial or terminal offices will be post-billed and mailed direct.

All letters for offices on other routes not railroad routes, excepting routes supplied through head offices on railroad routes, will be post-billed and mailed on the first head office through which they should pass on the proper route to the offices of delivery.

All letters for offices on railroad routes for which distributing offices are the office of supply, and for offices supplied through head offices on such railroad routes will be post-billed and mailed on the traveling post offices; and all letters for offices on other routes, railroad or otherwise, which should properly pass over such railroad routes to the offices of delivery, excepting those which should be properly sent to other distributing offices, or assorting offices or traveling post offices, as the case may be, with which regular exchange of mails in through bags is made, will be post-billed and mailed on the traveling post offices.

As in the case of assorting offices, it will be the duty of distributing offices to make regular exchange of mails in through bags with *all* distributing offices, with all *principal* assorting offices and traveling post offices other than those on railroad routes of which they are the initial or terminal offices, or otherwise. And the same method of post-billing and mailing letters for the offices and for distribution, with which regular exchange of mail in through bags is made, will be observed.

So far the duties of distributing offices are precisely similar to those of assorting offices. The importance of the former over the latter lies in the fact that they will necessarily handle for distribution a greater number of letters, because being selected for distributing duties with a view to centrality of location to populous routes and concentration of correspondence passing between distant points, greater accumulations in transit fall upon them, and hence the operations of such offices must take a wide range; and in the other respect that it will be their duty to make frequent and multiplied exchanges of mails for delivery and distribution in through bags with *all* offices of their own class (as well as for assorting and traveling post offices, as far as they may be instructed), with the end always in view of expediting the transmission of letters between distant places. The operations of a distributing office must

always be subservient to and controlled by the interest of the correspondence committed to its care. The speediest transmission of letters to places of their destination must be the chief aim of their labors, and therefore must be observed in the discharge of their responsible duties, the closest discrimination in forwarding letters to other offices with which regular exchange of mails is made, so that they will not be subject to an unnecessary distribution or retention on the way.

The number of this class of offices should be limited to the present necessity for them in the working of the new system.

IV.—THE DUTIES OF TRAVELING POST OFFICES

More important than either of the foregoing offices in a thoroughly efficient postal system is the traveling post-office.

It will be the duty of clerks of traveling post offices to receive letters at railway stations up to the latest moment of the departure of the trains, and all letters received at such offices from other offices, as well as those deposited therein for mailing, will be post-billed and mailed in the following manner:

Regular exchange of mails will be made by the traveling post office with each office on its route. Mails will be made up while the cars are in motion. All letters for offices on the route will be post-billed and mailed on them in order as they are reached by the train, and all letters for offices on other routes, not railroad routes, supplied through head offices on such railroad route will be post-billed and mailed on the head office from which such supply is properly made.

All letters for offices on other routes, railroad or otherwise, not supplied through either of the head offices on such railroad route, excepting letters for offices which should properly be sent to distributing offices, assorting offices, or other traveling post offices with which regular exchange of mail in through bags is made, will be post-billed and mailed on the assorting office at the beginning or end of such railroad route, or at the railroad crossings or connections, as the case may be.

It will also be the duty of this class of offices to make regular exchange of mails in through bags with distributing offices and assorting offices, as far as may be deemed expedient, and especially with other traveling post-offices in order to expedite the transmission of letters to the greatest extent attainable on their way to the places of their destination.

It will also be the duty of this class of offices to make regular exchange of return bags with each other on their respective routes, to the end that letters mailed on them in error by offices on their own routes, or sent to them by other offices, while going in one direction which should, on the proper route to the offices of delivery be sent in the opposite direction, the correction may be made and the letters returned at the point on the route where the traveling offices meet.

No. 3

CHICAGO, June 10, 1864.

SIR: By reference to Chapter IV of the Regulations of the Department in the edition of 1859, it will be seen that the instructions to postmasters in regard to the manner of forwarding letters would be, by the system proposed, null and void. Section 41 of the chapter named, reads thus:

"Every postmaster will mail and post-bill *direct* to the place addressed: first, all letters for his own State or Territory; second, all letters for post offices in other States and Territories, which should not pass through a distributing office on their proper route to the office of delivery; and third, all letters on which the instruction "mail direct" shall be written. Letters not required by the foregoing provisions to be mailed direct shall be post-billed and mailed to the distributing office through which they should first pass on the proper route to their place of destination — unless the mailing office be a distributing office.

"All letters received at a distributing office for distribution or deposited therein for mailing, and which are addressed to any other distributing office or to places in the State or Territory where such distributing office is situated, or to places not more than 100 miles distant from such distributing office, or which would not pass through a distributing office on the proper route to the office of delivery, *shall be mailed direct*; but if the office of delivery is *more* than 100 miles from such distributing office, and the letters should properly pass through one or more distributing offices, they shall be mailed and post-billed to the *last* distributing office through which they are to pass on their routes to the office of delivery."

Mailing direct to the extent required by the above instructions is one of the objections referred to in a previous letter, and for

the reasons therein given is entitled to weight. Other objections not necessary to point out will be suggested by a comparison of the method of forwarding letters described in the instructions quoted with that proposed in these letters. It is proper to repeat, however, that both in large and small offices misdirections of packages are known to be frequently made; and this constant exposure to liability of misdirection of whole mails is very objectionable. There is only one way to remedy this: To dispense with the use of wrappers entirely, except in the case of mails to distant places where they are required to protect letters from attrition and separation in transit. In the plan submitted, wrapping will be done away with, excepting in the cases just named; and as the quantity of paper used for this purpose will be comparatively trifling, the saving in this item of expense will be considerable, while the objections to the use of wrappers are removed. Another great item of tax on the revenues of the Department is incurred by the use of enormous quantities of post-bills and other necessary blanks in the present system. It is not proposed to do away with post-bills and other blanks altogether, but the quantities used will be very largely reduced and the expenditures therefor of course will be reduced in proportion. The saving of cost, however, would doubtless be secondary to the benefits to the people secured by a simplified system, to which reference has been already made.

V.—THE METHOD OF MAKING UP AND POST-BILLING MAILS

The form of the post-bill now in use need not be changed (as it is simple enough for the purpose designed), except a slight alteration in size and arrangement. It is proposed to do away with separate bills for delivery and distribution, excepting to distributing offices and principal assorting offices, where separate packages for delivery and distribution are essential to prevent delay in the necessary assorting of letters for rapid local deliveries, and in the distributing of letters for immediate outgoing mails, and to confine the entries in all other cases to one post-bill for each mail. The alteration referred to will simply be an elongation of the post-bill, and a division into two spaces — the upper space to be headed “for delivery,” and the lower one “for other offices.” And for the sake of uniformity and simplicity the two kinds of blanks — “mails received,” and

"mails received for distribution"—should be merged into one.

The different offices as classified, and in accordance with their duties as elsewhere defined, will make up and post-bill as follows:

Postmasters of route offices, after carefully assorting letters deposited therein for mailing, will enter them on the post-bill in the usual manner in the appropriate columns under the proper head "for delivery," in the case of letters for other route offices, and "for delivery" and "for other offices" in the case of letters for head offices and offices supplied through them.

The post-bill being completed, the postmaster will carefully fold it with the letters entered thereon and tie the whole securely with twine in one compact bundle, taking care first to see that the facing letters clearly indicate the office for which the package is destined. Wrapping paper will not be used.

When a route office forwards letters for offices on other routes supplied through a head office, on such head office the facing letter should be one addressed to such head office, to indicate the place of destination of the package; and in case there should be no letter addressed to such head office in any particular package, then the post-bill must be carefully wrapped around the letters forming the package, and securely tied, so that the name of such head office in the post-bill may be distinctly seen instead of a facing letter.

Postmasters of head offices, after carefully assorting letters deposited therein for mailing and received from other offices for other offices, will enter them on the post-bill in the usual manner in the appropriate column under the head of "for delivery" in the case of letters for route offices supplied *direct* by them, and "for delivery" and "for other offices" in the case of letters for delivery from other head offices and for offices supplied through them. Letters deposited therein for mailing and received from other offices for assorting offices and for other offices, which should be mailed on assorting offices for distribution, will be entered on separate post-bills—letters for delivery from the assorting offices entered under the head of "for delivery," and made up in separate packages with the post-bill relating thereto and securely tied, the facing letter indicating the assorting office, for which each package is destined; and letters for distribution will be entered under the head of "for other offices," and made up also in sepa-

rate packages with the post-bill relating thereto and securely tied, the post-bill itself indicating the place of their destination. Letters for offices supplied by traveling post offices and for distribution will be entered on the post-bill of course only under the head of "for other offices." Wrapping paper will not be used.

Postmasters of assorting offices, after carefully assorting letters deposited therein for mailing and received from other offices for distribution, will enter them on the post-bill in the usual manner, in the appropriate columns, under the proper heads, "for delivery" in the case of letters for route offices supplied direct by them, taking care, before the package with the post-bill relating thereto is finally made up and tied, to see that the facing letter legibly indicates the office for which it is destined. And all letters for delivery from head offices not on railroad routes, and for other offices supplied through such head offices, will be entered on the post-bill in the manner above described, if for delivery, and under the other head if for other offices supplied through them, the packages to be made up with the respective post-bills relating thereto, and tied in the same manner as described above. Letters thus made up for a head office will be comprised in one compact bundle with one post-bill. Wrapping paper will not be used.

All letters for offices on railroad routes, and for offices supplied through head offices on railroad routes, and all letters for offices on other routes which should properly pass over railroad routes to the place of their destination, excepting those which should be sent to distributing offices, or other assorting offices with which regular exchange of mail is made, to be mailed, as elsewhere stated, on the traveling post-offices, will be entered on the post-bill under the head of "for other offices," and with the completed post-bill, made up in compact bundles and securely tied with twine. Wrapping paper will not be used.

All letters for other principal assorting offices and for distributing offices with which regular exchange of mails in through bags is made, for delivery and distribution, will be entered under the proper heads, "for delivery" or "for other offices," on separate post-bills; and the letters for delivery and for distribution will be made up in a separate package or packages, with the completed post-bill relating thereto, strongly wrapped

and tied, and each package plainly directed to the office to which it is to be sent — that containing letters for distribution to be distinguished by the addition on the wrapper to the name of the office for which it is destined of the word "distribution" or its abbreviation, "dis."

Postmasters of distribution offices, after carefully assorting letters deposited therein for mailing and received from other offices for distribution, will enter them on the post-bill and make up the mails in the same manner precisely as assorting offices.

It is believed that the system herein set forth commends itself to the judgment and experience of experts in the service. It strips the service of its numerous hindrances for work, simplifies the labor, and through this the end sought in all postal reforms is arrived at.

With this reform, other questions intimately connected with its machinery and regulation, will arise, but these are not, and need not be, referred to here. They will be met as they are presented. The principal work of the postal system is described in these letters, and that is what is first most needed to be provided for.

If the reform be adopted, or any part of it, it is proposed to arrange a system of regular exchange of sealed bags or small lock-pouches, for security of letters, by route offices with each other and with head offices, and by head offices with each other and route offices supplied by them, in such a manner as to effectually check irregularities in the forwarding of mails.

The Davis Claim

Its Utter Absurdity Fully Exposed

The authorship and establishment of the Railway Mail Service, as the official testimony printed in these pages abundantly proves, is a matter of record in the Post Office Department at Washington.

It is claimed by the heirs of William A. Davis that the credit of devising and instituting this great system is due to him. Mr. Davis, in the early 60's held the office of Chief Clerk in the post office at St. Joseph, Missouri. The volume published under the authority of the Post Office Department in January, 1885, in pursuance of a resolution of the Senate of the United States, under the title "History of the Railway Mail Service: A Chapter in the History of Postal Affairs in the United States," contains all the evidence relating to this subject.

It does not appear from any well-substantiated source that Mr. Davis in 1862 had either conceived the plan to establish the present service or took any part whatever in the creative work necessary to build it up and maintain it. If there had been satisfactory prior railway service, would Postmaster-General Blair, under date of July 1, 1864, have given George B. Armstrong the formal authority "to test by actual experiment, upon such railroad route or routes as you may select at Chicago, the plans proposed by you for simplifying the mail service"? This letter is published in full on page 5 of this book, and in itself effectually shows the utter absurdity of the Davis claim. If there had been a railway postal service, there would have been no need of conducting experiments at that time.

True, there had been, even prior to the year 1860, some limited distribution of mail on the railways. This was particularly

so on the overland route running into St. Joseph, Missouri, where it connected with the California stages, and this distribution was necessitated by the crowded condition of the mails. But, with due respect to the memory of Mr. Davis, whose efficiency as a postal official is not questioned, it cannot be claimed, except upon the unsupported statements of two friends, made in his behalf more than twenty years later, and based only upon what is declared they heard him say, that it was he who took the initiative steps in the establishment of the system.

From the official history referred to, it appears (page 143) that on August 5, 1862, Mr. Davis addressed a communication to Second Assistant Postmaster-General McLellan, in words following, to wit:

SIR: I have the honor to report that in obedience to verbal orders received through Mr. Waller, special agent of the Department, one of the clerks and myself left here on Saturday 26th, so as to be in Quincy on Monday 28, ultimo, to commence the distribution of the overland mail on the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railway. Finding that the mail cars had not been arranged according to promise made to Mr. Waller, instead of going to Quincy I proceeded to Hannibal, and succeeded in getting cars temporarily fixed in which (though with some inconvenience) I think the work can be done until the new cars are ready. The distribution was commenced on Monday at Palmyra, and I assisted the clerk, going up as far as Clarence, at which place I turned back with the clerk, who had come down to go up on Tuesday; assisted up to the same point on Tuesday; turned back and distributed the mail going up on Wednesday myself. We have now got through with a week's service, and can confidently report that when the accommodations are finished, that are promised by Mr. Hayward, superintendent of the road, the distribution can be done entirely to your satisfaction.'

Most respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. A. DAVIS.

It is here plainly admitted that Mr. Davis was merely carrying out the "verbal" orders received through Mr. Waller from

the Department, and no intimation is made that he himself suggested anything with reference to the introduction of a new system of distribution.

On page 144 of the official history, we find two letters that have a direct bearing on the subject. One signed by Guy C. Barton, and dated Omaha, Nebraska, May 27, 1884, is as follows:

DEAR SIR: I have your favor of 10th inst. concerning claim of heirs of the late William A. Davis that he originated the idea of the late (*sic*) Railway Mail Service, and will say in reply that the claim is unquestionably a just one.

"At the time of the establishment of the overland mail service, the coaches left Saint Joseph, Mo., in the morning, about three hours after the arrival of the mail train over the Hannibal and Saint Joseph Railway, Saint Joseph being the distributing post-office at which the overland mail was made up. The time between the arrival of the mail from the East and the departure of the coaches for the West was found too short, and Mr. Davis, who was at that time chief clerk of the mailing department in the Saint Joseph office, suggested sending clerks from our office to Quincy, Ill., to meet the mail, and with authority to open the brass lock sacks and the Saint Joseph delivery post office packages, taking therefrom all California letters or letters going by overland stage route. These letters were made up precisely as they would have been at our office, and the records were a part of the records of the office. The superintendent of the Hannibal and Saint Joseph Railway had a car prepared under Mr. Davis' directions, and Mr. Davis, Thomas Clark, superintendent of mails at the New York post office, and myself went to Quincy with two clerks from the Saint Joseph office and rode from Palmyra, Mo., to Saint Joseph, Mo., in the first railway postal car that was ever built, so far as I know.

I have stated, as nearly as I can remember, the circumstances connected with this matter as affecting Mr. Davis, but it would be unjust to cease without saying that the success of the experiment was made easy by the quick perception of its advantages, and the prompt and energetic action of the Hon. J. L.

Bittinger, who was Postmaster at Saint Joseph at the time, and to whom all credit is due for whatever action I took in establishing the service as his representative.

Yours very truly,

GUY C. BARTON.

Under date of June 25, 1884, J. L. Bittinger writes from Kansas City, Missouri (official history, page 144):

I am satisfied that Mr. Barton sets forth the facts concerning the inauguration of the Railway Mail Service. I am as well satisfied that W. A. Davis, who was my predecessor in the office, was the originator of it as I am that I am living. Mr. Davis had been in the service of the Department, I think, over forty years. He knew every detail of the service, and had handled the overland mail from the start. The exigencies of the war rendered the operating of the Hannibal and Saint Joseph Railway exceedingly difficult, and almost every train would be behind time. As the overland coaches were expected to leave on their journey across the plains promptly, of necessity they frequently had to go without a great portion of the eastern mail.

Mr. Davis conceived the idea of distributing the mail on the cars, and laid the plans before me. I was satisfied they were good, and urged him to go ahead and request authority from the Department to experiment. He was soon granted the necessary authority, and with clerks detailed from the Saint Joseph office under his personal supervision the railway mail service between Quincy and Saint Joseph was soon in successful operation. . . . I suggest that possibly his correspondence on the subject with the Department may yet be preserved at Washington, which would settle the matter definitely. If the Hon. Mr. Zevely, then Third Assistant Postmaster-General is yet living, he could settle it at once.

Very truly yours,

JOHN L. BITTINGER.

The gist of the second letter is contained in the opening lines of the first paragraph, to wit: "I am satisfied that Mr. Barton" (the writer of the first letter) "sets forth the facts

concerning the inauguration of the Railway Mail Service. I am as well satisfied that W. A. Davis, who was my predecessor in the office, was the originator of it as I am that I am living." And the words designed to give special weight to Mr. Barton's plea, are the following: "I have your favor of the roth inst. concerning claim of heirs of the late William A. Davis that he originated the idea of the late (*sic*) Railway Mail Service, and will say in reply, that the claim is unquestionably a just one."

In order to determine the value of these letters, it is important to point out, first, that Mr. Davis was connected with the postal service for over forty years. He died about 1875. This was long after the credit for originating the great Railway Mail Service had been given to another person; a fact of which Mr. Davis, who could not have remained for forty years in the postal service had he not been a wide-awake and highly intelligent man, must have been fully aware. It is not known that he made the slightest remonstrance against the recognition of this other person as the originator of the service, and it is wholly incredible that he would have slumbered on his rights and said nothing about his claims, if he had any.

It seems that the only contemporaneous correspondence relating to Mr. Davis' connection with this work is the very letter from his own pen, quoted above, addressed to the Second Assistant Postmaster-General, in which he freely admits that "in obedience to verbal orders received from the special agent of the Department, he and one of the clerks in his office commenced the distribution of the overland mail on the Hannibal and Saint Joseph Railway." It is easy to see that with these "verbal" orders in his mind, he discussed with his fellow-workers in the postal service, Mr. Bittinger and Mr. Barton, the subject of distributing the mails on the overland route running into St. Joseph, and that after the lapse of twenty-two years, at the time his two friends and well-wishers wrote the above letters,

the matter appeared to them precisely in the light in which they represent it.

But such hazy testimony is wholly worthless as against the claims of others, which are founded upon incontestable contemporaneous proof of their connection with this system. It is well known to every lawyer how deceitful the human memory is when it is unsupported by contemporaneous written data, and that the further it is removed in point of time from the events to which it relates, the less credence it deserves.

It is unfortunate for Mr. Davis' case that his friends cannot present any "correspondence on the subject with the Department" bearing out their claim, but it goes without saying that if such correspondence had ever been in existence, it would have been preserved in the Department. It is rather late in the day now, after a lapse of over forty years, to undertake to make it appear that the laurels in this case have been placed upon the brow of an undeserving man.

Let us analyze the letters of Mr. Davis' two friends, Mr. Bittinger and Mr. Barton, written in 1884, a little further. Mr. Barton says, "The claim that Mr. Davis originated the idea of the late (*sic*) Railway Mail Service is unquestionably a good one," because when it was first started, as he claims, in 1862, a car was prepared under the direction of Mr. Davis, who went to Quincy, Illinois, with two clerks, and rode from Palmyra, Missouri, to St. Joseph, "in the first railway postal car that was ever built." Mr. Bittinger, in corroborating these statements, suggests that Mr. Davis' correspondence with the Post Office Department in Washington should bear him out, and calls on the "Hon. Mr. Zevely, Third Assistant Postmaster-General, if yet living," to settle the matter, i. e., the question as to the authorship of the Railway Mail Service.

Mr. Zevely, who was at that time still living, wrote in response

to this call (official history, page 179), under date of August 9, 1884, as follows:

At the suggestion of the Second Assistant Postmaster-General, I have read the statement prepared by Mr. Johnson relating to the history of the United States railway post office. Many of the facts given agree with my own knowledge and recollection, and I think the whole statement is substantially correct. In one particular only would I make a change: that is, for the purpose of crediting W. A. Davis, of Saint Joseph, Mo., with first *suggesting* to the Post Office Department *the distribution of the California overland mails* on the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railway. This fact *seems* to be established by *Mr. Bittinger's testimony*—then Postmaster at St. Joseph, whose letter on the subject is in the Post Office Department.

The statement of Mr. Johnson, principal clerk in the Mail Equipment Division, to which Mr. Zevely here refers, and which is quite an elaborate document, is found on pages 174 to 179 of the official history. Mr. Zevely says above that many of the facts therein contained agree with his own knowledge and recollection, but as for Mr. Davis being entitled to the honor of having originated the Railway Mail Service, which Mr. Bittinger asks Mr. Zevely "to settle" at once, the latter evidently has no knowledge or recollection. Quite the reverse; for, first of all he reduces this honor, in express language, to the modest claim of "having first suggested to the Post Office Department the distribution of the California overland mail on the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railway"; and secondly, he will not assume personal responsibility even for this assertion, but throws it upon the shoulders of Mr. Bittinger, because he distinctly states, "this fact *seems* to be established by Mr. Bittinger's letter."

It has been seen that Mr. Bittinger clamors particularly for Mr. Davis' "correspondence with the Department." but all he gets is the scant comfort that what he claims for Mr. Davis rests on his own words alone, and this only to a very limited extent, for it is not the honor that his friend Barton claimed for

Mr. Davis, that he had originated the idea of the Railway Mail Service, but only that of "first suggesting to the Post Office Department the distribution of the California overland mails on the Hannibal and Saint Joseph Railway," and nothing more. It is perfectly obvious, therefore, that there never was a trace of correspondence on the subject in the Post Office Department from Mr. Davis' pen.

A careful perusal of the official history of the Railway Mail Service shows, however, very plainly that whatever Mr. Davis' merits may have been, all that was accomplished with reference to the distribution of the overland mails on the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railway was a mere makeshift, designed alone to serve a present need caused by the congestion of the mails shipped West from the Missouri River, and lacking all the characteristics of a great general postal reform.

It is distinctly stated in the letter written by H. L. Johnson, of the Mail Equipment Division (page 178 of the official history), that "Mr. Davis being regularly appointed in December, 1862, a special agent of the Department *to superintend it for the purposes of the overland mails* it was continued in operation until by the extension of railroads westward to connect with the Union Pacific Railway, rapidly approaching completion, *the course and distribution of the overland mails were changed.*"

In plain English, this means that the Davis experiment of mail distribution on the cars was abandoned, because the exigency having passed, there was no further need of this makeshift.

This distribution was made only one way, while the east-bound trains were absolutely without it. One mail only was distributed going in one direction. And besides, the work was irregularly performed, as well as subject to serious interruption. E. S. Childs, of the Post Office Department, under

date of July 25, 1865, writes as follows (official history, page 157) to the Postmaster at St. Joseph, Missouri.

This office is surprised to learn from letter just received from Special Agent Branscombe, dated at Saint Joseph on the 19th inst., that the distribution of overland mail matter on the cars of the Hannibal and Saint Joseph Railway has been discontinued and its distribution compelled to be made in your office, which causes a delay of some twenty-four hours. Will you please ascertain and report why the distribution on the cars has ceased, and what has become of the agent and clerks who were in charge of that duty.

To call this temporary makeshift the Railway Mail Service of to-day is like calling an old-fashioned prairie-schooner a modern California Limited.

The one man to whom the fame is due of having installed the present perfect Railway Mail Service, and having not only devised the minutest details for its successful establishment and operation, but having placed it from the start, first on the Chicago and Northwestern Railway, and later on the other leading lines, upon an enduring footing, is George B. Armstrong, who was the Assistant Postmaster at Chicago in the 50's and the first half of the 60's, and who died in 1871, after having served for two years as General Superintendent of the Railway Mail Service when it was made a separate bureau of the Post Office Department in Postmaster-General Creswell's administration.

We do not deny that the defects that existed in the system of distributing the mails before the introduction of the Railway Mail Service now in force were keenly felt by those who had the handling of the mails in their charge. These defects were more clearly apparent in the slow movement and crowded condition of the California overland mails, and since necessity is the mother of invention, it is doubtless true that Mr. Davis was the first to have cars prepared for the distribution of the California overland mails.

But it does not follow from this that it was he who first devised the plan, or who in the least aided in establishing it upon a broad and permanent basis. He was merely "carrying out the verbal orders of the Department" in running the first postal car. The system itself, in its inception and entire development, is the creation of the broad and comprehensive mind of George B. Armstrong. The official history leaves no doubt whatever of this fact. We quote from page 83, as follows:

The handling of through mail on the cars without turning it into distributing offices began, as has been shown, *in a small way with respect to the overland mails only*, under the superintendence of William A. Davis, in July, 1862. It was urged upon the Department and elaborated into a more general scheme by George B. Armstrong in 1864. It was conducted at first as a doubtful, and afterwards a successful, experiment under the double superintendence of Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Park from 1865 to 1869. It widened into greater usefulness under Mr. Armstrong from 1869 to 1871. . . .

In order to show how profoundly Mr. Armstrong had studied the imperfections of the system which was to be replaced by the Railway Mail Service, and had planned what means should be adopted to remove them, it is only necessary to consider carefully the three "Letters on Postal Reform," printed in full in this volume, which were addressed to Third Assistant Postmaster-General Zevely in May and June, 1864. In general outline, the Railway Mail Service as it exists to-day is exactly as it was designed in these now famous letters. An examination of the letters will prove this statement to be absolutely true.

The evidence offered in these pages is conclusive that it was Mr. Armstrong alone in whose creative mind this system was first conceived. As early as 1861, he suggested it to his friend and neighbor, Francis A. Eastman, a few years later Postmaster of Chicago during President Grant's first administration, and

from that time he labored with enthusiastic ardor to secure its establishment. In these efforts, the record shows, he encountered the severest opposition of incredulous and half hearted superiors, who looked upon the scheme as impractical and chimerical. But the greater the difficulties that surrounded him, so much the greater was the energy he expended in the accomplishment of the splendid work that he had planned; until at last, after several years of incessant labors, satisfied the most doubting by the admirable letters he wrote to the Department, that his views on postal reform were correct and should be carried into execution.

The efforts now put forth in certain quarters to make it appear that the honors of devising and creating this system were due, not to Mr. Armstrong, but to some other person, amount to a gross distortion of the truth. Upon the evidence here produced, which covers the entire ground so far as official and private testimony is at all obtainable, we may safely leave it to the unbiased reader to determine whether it is just to pluck a single leaf from the laurel wreath placed by Vice-President Schuyler Colfax, and other prominent men, upon the brow of that distinguished American citizen, George B. Armstrong, many years ago.



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